



## Federal forces in Mexico increasingly harass journalists

Dear President Calderón,

On Freedom of Expression Day today, the Committee to Protect Journalists is writing to express concern about a series of incidents this year in which federal security forces have attacked and harassed local reporters who cover crime and report on law enforcement operations.

While reporters covering the drug trade are often targeted by criminal groups—which are frequently working with corrupt officials—CPJ has documented an [increasing number](http://cpj.org/blog/2008/08/mexican-journalists-increasingly-clash-with-securi.php) (<http://cpj.org/blog/2008/08/mexican-journalists-increasingly-clash-with-securi.php>) of assaults committed by federal forces since your administration deployed thousands of troops and federal police to combat organized crime in December 2006

Since the beginning of the year, CPJ and local press groups have documented the following transgressions by federal forces. In all cases, journalists identified themselves as members of the press or were holding media credentials.

- On February 18, federal police attacked Hugo Alfredo Olivera Cartas, reporter with the Morelia-based daily *La Voz de Michoacán*, on his way to cover a shooting in Chiquihuitillo, Michoacán state, according to [Cambio de Michoacán](http://www.cambiodemichoacan.com.mx/vernota.php?id=118891) (<http://www.cambiodemichoacan.com.mx/vernota.php?id=118891>). Police pushed Olivera to the floor and beat him, according to the paper. Olivera filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission.
- Military personnel harassed Angel Cervantes, a photojournalist with television station Channel 44 in Ciudad Juárez, as he covered the arrest of alleged criminals in late March, Cervantes told CPJ. Cervantes, who recorded the incident, posted a [video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH1_vfs7Wo) ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH1\\_vfs7Wo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH1_vfs7Wo)) on YouTube that was also aired on Channel 44 taken while army officials were trying to seize his camera and detain him. Channel 44 reported the incident to the Secretariat of National Defense, which said it will investigate the case.
- On April 2, two military officials tried to seize the camera of a photojournalist working for the daily *El Mexicano* as he was taking pictures of a boat being towed in Villa Ahumada, Chihuahua State, according to the Mexican press group Center for Journalism and Public Ethics, or CEPET. Soldiers threatened to arrest the reporter after he refused to release the camera, CEPET said. The reporter—whose name was withheld for security reasons—filed a complaint with the Chihuahua Human Rights Commission.
- CEPET also [reported](http://libex.cepet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=897:militares-obstaculizan-a-reporteros-y-los-obligan-a-borrar-material-fotografico&catid=36:alertas&Itemid=55) ([http://libex.cepet.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=897:militares-obstaculizan-a-reporteros-y-los-obligan-a-borrar-material-fotografico&catid=36:alertas&Itemid=55](http://libex.cepet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=897:militares-obstaculizan-a-reporteros-y-los-obligan-a-borrar-material-fotografico&catid=36:alertas&Itemid=55)) that army officials seized the camera of a photojournalist who requested anonymity for security reasons working for the newspaper *El Heraldo de Chihuahua* and deleted all the photographs. The reporter was taking pictures during a military search in San Francisco de Choncos, northern Mexico, CEPET said. *El Heraldo de Chihuahua* reported the incident to the chief of the military zone in Chihuahua.
- Luz del Carmen Sosa, a crime reporter with the Ciudad Juarez-based daily *El Diario*, and photojournalist Mario Bañuelos were harassed by soldiers on May 6 while covering the disappearance of three public employees in the town of El Porvenir, Chihuahua state, Sosa told CPJ. Army officials pointed their guns at Bañuelos, tried to grab his camera, and threatened both reporters with detention, Sosa said. The journalists filed a [complaint](http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=8b231533cdd265ecf5cca4ffb4e60606) (<http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=8b231533cdd265ecf5cca4ffb4e60606>) with the National Human Rights Commission.

Mexico has become one of world's most dangerous countries for the press. More than 30 reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared since you took office three and a half years ago, CPJ [research](http://cpj.org/killed/americas/mexico/) (<http://cpj.org/killed/americas/mexico/>) shows. The cases listed above show the need for urgent actions by your administration to prevent federal forces from using violence against the media in an already hazardous environment for news reporting.

Federal forces must recognize that the media has a job to perform and must keep citizens informed about issues of public interest—like the impact of violence and official corruption. We call on your government to develop new procedures and training to ensure that soldiers and federal police facilitate rather than hinder this necessary work.

It is unacceptable that journalists covering crime are being attacked and harassed by federal security forces. We urge your administration to conduct thorough inquiries into these cases and prosecute those who have acted illegally. Military and federal police must be accountable for their actions.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

Joel Simon

Executive Director

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