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Mexican Rights Defender Flees to U.S.

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico – A Chihuahua state human rights commissioner investigating accusations against police and soldiers in this violent border city revealed that he fled several weeks ago to El Paso, Texas, in the face of death threats.

Gustavo de la Rosa told a television station in Ciudad Juarez that he was monitoring cases involving alleged human rights violations by some of the thousands of troops and federal police sent to Chihuahua to battle drug cartels.

De la Rosa said he requested the intervention of the United Nations and other international organizations after he got no support from law enforcement and the judiciary in Chihuahua.

He said that early last month, a man got out of a car that drove up beside his on the street and De la Rosa thought the man was going to kill him "because that's how they do it." But, the activist said, "He just told me, resign already because we're going to kill you, and he left."

Days later at a "gasoline station, I went into the bathroom and a man entered and told me: 'I truly respect you a lot. I'm very fond of you, but shut up because they're going to kill you...'"

He explained that after consulting with top-level officials, they just recommended that he protect himself because "the threats now are real."

He added that since Aug. 25 he had been asking the chairman of the State Human Rights Commission to provide protection for him and his home, but he had gotten no response.

De la Rosa said that Chihuahua Attorney General Patricia Gonzalez offered protection to him if and when he followed the request protocol expressed by the directors of the rights commission.

He said that the threats against him started after he began to represent families affected by police and military abuses and began to make public statements about those cases.

He said that since that time he had taken his family to different houses in Ciudad Juarez and neighboring El Paso to reduce the possibility of an attack on them.

In addition, De la Rosa sent text messages to several journalists in which he said that he was in El Paso taking refuge because of the threats but in good shape.

He said that he did not know who made the death threats against him, but he warned that if he were to become the victim of a hit, his family will have the murderer arrested.

"Be it a thug, a criminal or a general, my family will arrest him and put him in jail ... We don't accept impunity," he added.

With 1,600 homicides in 2008 and more than 1,700 so far this year, Juarez is Mexico's most dangerous city. EFE

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