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Mexico. Escalating Harassment of Reporter is Cause for Concern

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Operating in a climate permeated by violence and impunity, Mexico City based investigative journalist Laura Castellanos continues to be subjected to acts of intimidation because of her reporting on armed groups and radical movements. The continued harassment of journalists highlights the urgent need for the Mexican State to implement an emergency mechanism to protect journalists at risk.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH238/Laura_Castellanos_9553-2-6e675.jpg

Laura Castellanos in Paris, Salon du livre libertaire.

The recent break-in to Castellanos' house marks a long line of intimidation acts, which includes phone tapping, email intervention and constant surveillance of her living premises. Castellanos was in Paris at the time of the incident on May 10th, promoting her latest book titled *Armed Mexico*. Castellanos is a renowned freelance investigative journalist with over 20 years experience of reporting on armed groups and radical movements operating in Mexico.

Castellanos explained to ARTICLE 19 that every time she appears in the media to promote her books or to report her findings, a security incident takes place within a few days. *"I am aware that the objective is to intimidate and silence me"*, said Castellanos. *"Since I decided to continue my work, what really worries me is the fact that the intensity of each act has increased throughout the time."*

ARTICLE 19 is including Castellanos in its protection programme and the legal team will initiate legal work, including demanding an effective investigation, in order for her to continue providing public information, without fear of harassment. A recently published ARTICLE 19 report, *Attacks on Freedom of Expression in Mexico*, shows that in 2009, 65.5% of all reported aggressions against journalists were perpetrated by state agents, and 28% were carried out by members of the Army or other military or security institutions. Regardless of this fact and the recurrent statements made by the authorities, the Mexican state is yet to materialise an emergency mechanism to protect journalists and human rights defenders at risk.

ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Mexican state to protect and defend journalists, especially when they are providing vital information to the public as is in the case of Laura Castellanos. Furthermore we call upon the Mexican State to, according to international law, refrain from intervening in the free flow of information and to provide the proper training to members of the Armed Forces and Security Agents in order to protect the right to freedom of expression under its jurisdiction.

Castellanos has published two books, *Armed Mexico 1943-1981* gives an account of the radicalisation process of political groups during the second half of the twentieth century, and *Corte de Caja*, which contains an extended interview with Subcomandante Marcos, the military leader of EZLN (the Zapatista Army of National Liberation), an armed group operating in the southeast region, in which he spoke about the ongoing counter- insurgency strategy of the state. This was the last interview granted by the rebel leader since 2007.

Castellanos was the first journalist to publish a testimony without anonymity, of a member of the armed forces regarding the grave human rights violations that took place during the 1970s and 1980s against political dissidents. The work of Castellanos is considered as a point of reference for media, scholars and human rights groups advocating for the right to know the truth on the events of the so-called "dirty war".

Post-scriptum :

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