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The situation of journalists and human rights defenders in Mexico**European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2022 on the situation of journalists and human rights defenders in Mexico (2022/2580(RSP))**

(2022/C 347/16)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Mexico,
 - having regard to the Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Cooperation Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the United Mexican States, of the other part ⁽¹⁾ (EU-Mexico Global Agreement), which has been in force since 2000, and to the modernised agreement,
 - having regard to the EU-Mexico High-Level Dialogues on Human Rights and High-Level Dialogue on Multilateral Issues,
 - having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline,
 - having regard to the local statement by the European Union, Norway and Switzerland of 15 February 2022 on the murder of journalist Heber López Vásquez,
 - having regard to the joint statement by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and the Mexico Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 28 January 2022 condemning the murder of María de Lourdes Maldonado López,
 - having regard to the statement by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 19 October 2020 entitled ‘UN expert encourages Mexico to increase protection of human rights defenders’,
 - having regard to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity of 2012,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
 - having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas violence, human rights violations and attacks against journalists and human rights defenders, including environmental defenders and indigenous people and communities, and women rights defenders are dramatically rising in Mexico; whereas widespread violence in Mexico continues to increase as was seen during the local and regional elections of June 2021, and whereas the situation of the rule of law is seriously deteriorating; whereas a concerning and dramatic number of journalists and human rights defenders, particularly those who investigate corruption involving public officials or expose the work of criminal drug cartels, especially at a local level, are being warned, harassed, threatened, raped, attacked, enforcedly disappeared and even killed and surveyed either by government authorities or criminal groups; whereas a mass murder took place on 27 February 2022 with 17 people killed;
- B. whereas Mexico has long been the most dangerous and deadliest place for journalists outside an official war zone according to different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations; whereas according to Reporters Without Borders, for the third consecutive year in 2021, Mexico was the most dangerous country in the world for journalists and ranked 143rd out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 276, 28.10.2000, p. 45.

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- C. whereas 2022 marks the deadliest beginning to a year for journalists in Mexico, with at least six journalists having been assassinated; whereas the killings of María de Lourdes Maldonado López, Margarito Martínez, José Luis Gamboa, Heber López Vásquez and Roberto Toledo are but a few dramatic examples of attacks against journalists and media workers; whereas journalists are having to endure poor labour conditions and many lack access to health and mental care services; whereas the situation has deteriorated since the last presidential elections in July 2018, with at least 47 journalists assassinated according to official sources;
- D. whereas according to the Ministry of the Interior, at least 68 human rights defenders have been killed in Mexico since December 2018; whereas the level of violence against women and number of femicides are high and despite some institutional steps, the number of people who have disappeared is extremely alarming;
- E. whereas President López Obrador has frequently used populist rhetoric in daily press briefings to denigrate and intimidate independent journalists, media owners and activists; whereas the rhetoric of abuse and stigmatisation generates an atmosphere of relentless unrest towards independent journalists; whereas under the pretext of combating fake news, the Mexican Government has created a state-owned platform to exhibit, stigmatise and attack the critical press; whereas in February 2022 journalists staged protests in 13 of the 32 Mexican states, demanding greater security and investigations into the attacks targeting journalists;
- F. whereas as of January 2022, the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists had protection measures in place for 1 518 people — 1 023 human rights defenders and 495 journalists; whereas the mechanism is marred by serious deficiencies in terms of the amount of funding and number of staff available, a lack of adequate accompaniment, a lack of coordination with state governments and delays in carrying out the protection measures, which often cost lives; whereas at least nine beneficiaries who were under the protection programme have been killed;
- G. whereas the Mexican State is working on the creation of a national prevention and protection system for human rights defenders and journalists that will rest on a General Prevention and Protection Act on Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and will include the adoption of a national prevention model, the creation of national attack records, and the implementation of a national protection protocol;
- H. whereas institutionalised and widespread corruption, abetted by a deficient judicial system, is engendering an endemic problem of impunity, with around 95 % of journalists' murders going unpunished; whereas as the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has pointed out, this impunity conveys a message that violence is permissible, encouraging new crimes to be committed and generating an effect of self-censorship; whereas the Mexican Government has not properly carried out the reforms needed to reduce violence and impunity, including for crimes against journalists and human rights defenders;
- I. whereas there are strong indications that the Mexican State has made use of phone-hacking tools intended to counter terrorism and cartels, including the Pegasus spyware, against journalists and human rights defenders;
- J. whereas in November 2020 Mexico ratified the Escazú Agreement, which includes strong protection for environmental defenders; whereas Mexico should prioritise its implementation;
- K. whereas a worrying legislative proposal was recently presented to the Congress seeking to bar any NGO that receives foreign funding from attempting to influence legislation or from participating in strategic litigation;
- L. whereas several constitutional reforms of the electoral and judicial systems — initiated by the López Obrador administration — raise doubts about the stability of the rule of law and legal certainty;
- M. whereas the EU-Mexico strategic partnership has enabled closer cooperation between the EU and Mexico on issues of global importance, and in particular enhanced dialogue, coordination and exchanges in areas such as security, human rights, electoral reform, regional development and regulatory and trade policies; whereas Mexico and the European Union share common values;

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N. whereas the EU-Mexico Global Agreement includes clauses on human rights and democracy, namely in Articles 1 and 39; whereas the EU-Mexico High-Level Dialogue on Human Rights that took place in 2020 culminated in an agreement on joint work in Mexico to step up protection for human rights defenders;

1. Condemns the threatening, harassment and killing of journalists and human rights defenders in Mexico, including environmental defenders and indigenous people and communities; calls on the authorities to investigate the killings in a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial manner and, in the case of journalists and media workers, in accordance with the approved protocol for the investigation of crimes against freedom of expression;

2. Expresses its deepest sympathy, solidarity and condolences for all of the victims and their families; reiterates its concern about the climate of insecurity and hostility faced by human rights defenders and journalists and stands with them in solidarity;

3. Underscores that freedom of speech online and offline, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly constitute key mechanisms in the functioning of a healthy democracy; calls on the Mexican authorities to take all the necessary steps to ensure the protection and the creation of a safe environment for journalists and human rights defenders in line with established international standards, including by addressing at both state and federal levels the issue of widespread corruption, inadequate training and resources, the complicity of some officials and deficient judicial systems, which leads to such high rates of impunity;

4. Notes with concern the systematic and tough critiques used by the highest authorities of the Mexican Government against journalists and their work and condemns the frequent attacks on media freedom and journalists and media workers in particular; reiterates that journalism can only be carried out in an environment free from threats, physical, psychological or moral aggression, or other acts of intimidation and harassment, and calls on the Mexican authorities to uphold and safeguard the highest standards for the protection of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of choice;

5. Calls on the authorities, and in particular the highest ones, to refrain from issuing any communication which could stigmatise human rights defenders, journalists and media workers, exacerbate the atmosphere against them or distort their lines of investigation; calls on those authorities to publicly underscore the pivotal role played by human rights defenders and journalists in democratic societies;

6. Urges the Government of Mexico to take concrete, prompt and effective measures to strengthen national, state and local institutions and to implement a set of urgent, comprehensive and coherent strategies for prevention, protection, reparations and accountability in order to ensure that human rights defenders and journalists can continue their activities without fear of reprisal and without restriction, in line with the recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; recommends that Mexico integrate a gender perspective when addressing the safety of journalists and human rights defenders;

7. Urges the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists to fulfil its promise to increase its funding and resources and to establish more expeditious processes to include defenders and journalists as beneficiaries with a view to saving lives and guaranteeing the safety of those under threat, including granting security measures to their families, colleagues and lawyers; underlines that public protection policies should effectively involve the governmental bodies and institutions of each state and the local level;

8. Encourages the Mexican Government to take action to strengthen state institutions and consolidate the rule of law with a view to tackling some of the structural problems at the root of the human rights violations and calls for civil organisations working in the field of human rights to be involved in this process; welcomes the creation of the National Search Commission (CNB) with the goal of searching mass graves across the country and taking steps to determine and publish the true number of people who have disappeared;

9. Calls on the Mexican Government to fully cooperate with the UN bodies and to extend a standing invitation to the visit of all special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and to cooperate with them in a proactive manner;

10. Welcomes the recent visit of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to Mexico and the recognition by the government of the committee's jurisdiction to consider cases from Mexico, allowing families of victims to submit cases to the committee once they have exhausted legal recourse domestically;

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11. Calls on all Member States, the European External Action Service and the EU Delegation to Mexico to raise human rights concerns with their Mexican counterparts and to put the protection of journalists and human rights defenders at the centre of EU-Mexico dialogues; urges the EU Delegation and the Member States to fully implement the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline in order to provide all appropriate support for the work of human rights defenders and journalists;

12. Underlines the importance of Mexico as a strategic partner; recalls the importance of a strong and deep EU-Mexico relationship and reaffirms its commitment to fostering relations through the modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement, which further strengthens human rights provisions and enables the EU and Mexico to discuss a range of issues such as human rights with civil society, including journalists, human rights defenders and others at a multilateral level;

13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Member States, the Presidency *pro tempore* of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, and the President, Government and Congress of Mexico.
