

# Church official condemns fatal shootings of local journalists

MEXICO CITY – A church official in Mexico's poor southern state of Oaxaca condemned the fatal shootings of two Triqui Indian community radio announcers, saying it was a crime of repression against independent media operators.

Father Leoncio Hernandez of the Santiago Apoala parish said the slayings appeared to be a deliberate attempt to silence those who spoke out against injustice.

"It is a slaying of two people who are spreading the truth in their communities," Father Hernandez told Catholic News Service. "The people behind this are those who are scared of the truth."

Father Hernandez, an outspoken supporter of human rights in Oaxaca, said the attack could be the work of gunmen working for the state government, and he urged a federal investigation into the incident. Murder is normally a state crime in Mexico.

Radio announcers Teresa Bautista, 24, and Felicitas Martinez, 20, were ambushed and killed as they traveled in a truck from San Juan Copala to the Oaxacan state capital for a forum on human rights, state police said.

The attackers used Kalashnikov assault rifles and left more than 20 bullet shells scattered around the corpses. Three other people traveling in the truck also were injured.

Ms. Bautista and Ms. Martinez worked on a community station called "The Voice That Breaks the Silence," which forms part of a network of community radio stations run by indigenous people in Mexico.

The France-based international press freedom group, Reporters Without Borders, released a statement saying the attack was an affront to the movement of community media outlets.

"Their murders will be traumatic for all of Latin America's many community radio

stations, which are too often ignored or despised by the rest of the media and by governments,” Reporters Without Borders said. “We are conscious of the risks run by the press in Oaxaca state, where the political climate continues to be tense. ... We hope the investigators quickly establish the circumstances and motives for this double murder and catch those responsible. And we join their community in paying tribute to the two victims.”

Oaxaca is among the poorest states in Mexico, with an average income of less than one-eighth of those in Mexico’s wealthier northern states. Many inhabitants live without paved roads, running water or electricity.

It has a long history of political violence both between the government and its opponents and among rival groups in the rough countryside communities.

However, the bloodshed has increased substantially since state Gov. Ulises Ruiz was accused of rigging the 2004 election to win office; human rights groups say he is sending gunmen to assassinate opponents. In 2006, a broad protest movement to oust him from power led to clashes that left at least 13 people, mostly protesters, dead.

Among those killed were U.S. Indymedia journalist Bradley Roland Will of New York and local indigenous columnist Raul Marcial Perez, both of whom were shot dead.

Other parts of Mexico have also been dangerous for journalists in recent years, with dozens of reporters killed in northern border states where violent cartels traffic narcotics to the United States. The bloodshed has led press organizations to classify Mexico as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists.