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Human rights in Mexico Diary

Migrant hub & poisoned gold

Saturday 6th October

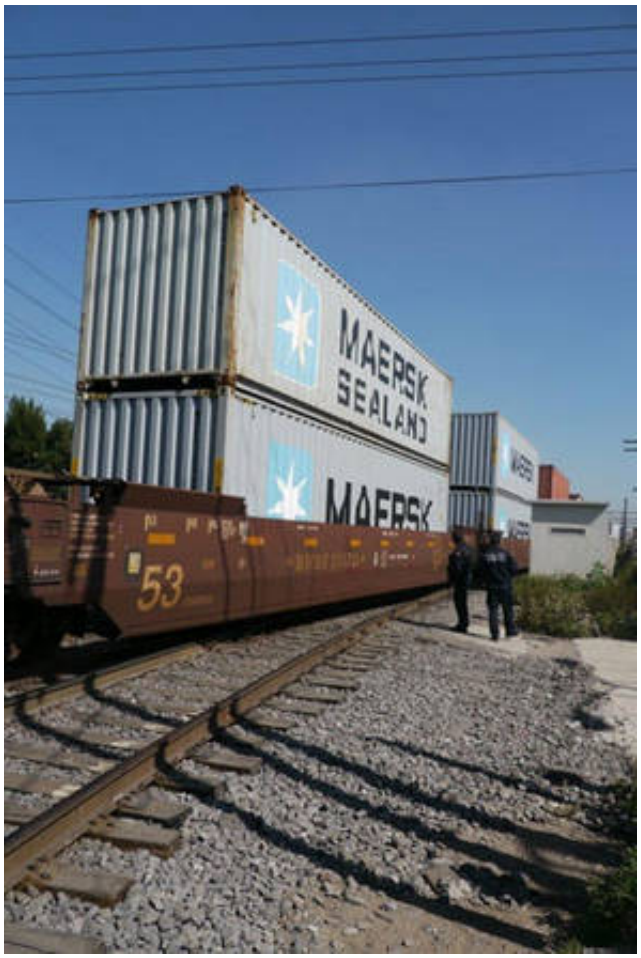
"Migrant Hub"

A large number of people are migrating from Central American countries to the USA due to the catastrophic situation in their home countries. One possibility to cross Mexico is to jump on cargo trains. In the North of Mexico City many railroads converge and the migrants use this "hub" to change trains and to relax for a few days. Many of them get hurt as they jump on our off the trains. They cannot sleep on the trains because of the danger of falling off the train. Some NGOs opened a shelter three months ago at the hub next to the railways after another shelter run by the church had to close down. In the shelter that consists mainly of plastic sheeting the migrants can rest a little bit from their long, tiring and dangerous journey. Mexican law does not allow the police to enter the migrant shelter in order to readmit the "Illegals".



We talk to some of the mostly very young people. The proportion of women is very low at about 10% – the journey is especially dangerous for female migrants. One man tells us that he left Honduras 15 days ago. For him it is already the third attempt to get to the US. We meet two pregnant women. One of them is heavily pregnant and will most likely give birth in the shelter as going on would be too dangerous. Another young man describes his five month horror trip when the Mexican police caught him, beat him up, violated

him and stole his entire savings.



The work of the shelter is completely dependent on volunteers and on donations to buy food and medicine. All over Mexico there are about 50 such migrant shelters.

Thursday 4th & Friday 5th October

Poisoned gold

In the little town San Jose del Progreso a Canadian company started some years ago to explore and exploit silver and gold. Since the company entered the village, conflicts have erupted and are ongoing today. The situation is very complex. In a nutshell, the initial problem was that the company started exploring the mine without previous consultation with the inhabitants. They apparently also bribed the local government. While the company is each day extracting metal worth 5 million peses, the village is split: a small part of the village including the mayor is in favour of the mine, either because they are profiting from the “financial support” of the company or they found work in the mines. The large majority of the village is however opposing the mine. This is leading to violence, harassment and even murder. At the beginning of this year two activists were killed and several seriously hurt. The victims complain that the government of Oaxaca is not supporting them enough.



We talked about that case and others with the human rights representative of the Oaxaca government, Eréndira Cruzvillegas. Like in the case of Bety and Jyri she pointed to the difficult situation of the government. Governor Cue took office one and a half years ago after 80 years of PRI rule. That means a still very high influence of the PRI in the state due to the rigid structures they had established. Moreover the violent circumstances in lots of communities require a more cautious approach in order not to provoke more violence. At least this is governor's Cue opinion when we talked with him about the murders of Bety and Jyri. We also met an activist to talk about the construction of windmills and the related problems in the Istmo region. For Greens it does of course seem at first a little bit odd to meet with wind energy opponents. But we quickly learned that the organisations are not against the use of wind power as such in Oaxaca. The central problem is that like often in Mexico neither the government nor the companies consult the local population. Furthermore, the possibility to introduce privately produced electricity in the grid does not exist in Mexico and thus the local people to not really benefit from the wind energy at all.

Wednesday 3rd October 2012

Meeting with the government



We first met with the Finnish embassy which has been actively following the case of Jyri Jaakkola since the beginning; after that we met with the German embassy that we also asked for further support in Bety's and Jyri's case and in all the other cases that were reported to us (by for example being present in the court

trials). A new attempt was then made to have a meeting in the Senate with the newly elected group leaders. After many telephone calls and after almost standing already in front of the PRI group leader's office it became clear that they simply just do not want to meet us because we will ask too many difficult or critical questions. At the last elections in July the PRI (Party of the Institutionalised Revolution) was re-elected after a 12 year break. The PRI had been in power for over 70 years up until 2000 and had established an authoritarian, tightly controlled system. After such a democratic break, people are now watching closely how PRI will deal with their newly regained power. We departed to Oaxaca, where the murder of Jyir and Bety took place. The investigations and the possible trial will be in the hands of the state justice there. In addition, the state of Oaxaca has similar structures to our first stop on this mission, Guerrero: poverty is omnipresent, a high rate of indigenous people, a very active civil society, and unfortunately, strong repression by the state. Oaxaca also has the highest rate of acts of aggression against human rights defenders. They are being harassed, kidnapped, defamed in the conservative media, and even killed. Many social conflicts deal with land, mining and energy projects, even wind mills. We met with representatives of NGOs there to find out more about the situation on the ground for human rights defenders, and report back on our findings. ----------

Tuesday 2nd October 2012



Mexico is about to reform its labour law. Although this was not a topic of our delegation visit we (in)voluntary participated in protests against the reform. As opponents of the reform were blocking the senate we could not attend the planned meetings with the group leaders of the parliament and thus spontaneously joined the protests. The Mexican government plans to liberalise the labour market, to privatise large parts of the education system and outsource parts of the public sector. After the unforeseen addition to the agenda we finally met in the afternoon representatives of the ministry of interior and the so called transition team which has the responsibility of governing until the July elected new government takes office in December. In the case of Bety and Jyri that we are following, they promised us that a proper investigation will finally commence in the coming six months – this after two years of, essentially, complete inactivity. On the one hand it sounded very promising. On the other hand we still have to follow closely these next steps in the following months because a lot had been promised before with little result. The representatives were also keen to tell us about their success stories, with new laws and amended laws concerning human rights, disappeared people, protection of journalists and victims. Following some critical remarks by our delegation the government admitted that there is a huge gap between the institutional set up and the reality on the ground. Partly it is because of the federal system that gives the states a great deal of autonomy and often leaves gaps in implementing federal law. Another reason for that gap is the political culture in the country that is only changing slowly. The newly elected government under President Peña Nieto has announced its intention to put human rights high on the agenda. This remains to

be closely examined as up until now the media darling's performance on that topic has been lacking (see yesterday's entry). ----------

Monday 1st October 2012

Feminicides continue



After returning to Mexico City we spend the day mainly meeting with NGOs that deal with the worrying human rights situation in the country. Crucial to the day is a late evening meeting with David Peña, lawyer of the families of Bety Cariño and Jyri Jaakkola, both of whom were killed on 27th August 2010 in the state of Oaxaca by a government-associated paramilitary group. They were taking part in a humanitarian caravan that wanted to bring medicine to the indigenous village San Juan Copala. Since then Satu Hassi and Ska Keller have followed the case. As Jyri was Finnish, the case attracted international attention and chances for a full and just process are higher than in the other cases of fatal attacks on human rights activists. At least that is what we hope. Until recently, the judicial authorities in Mexico did not really do anything, other than small steps when MEPs were present. But after the discussion with David Peña we are a little bit more optimistic. The authorities seem to be moving on this case.

The discussions with activists who deal with the uncountable number of killings of women in Mexico confirmed that these "feminicides" continue. For over a decade the Mexican government has been internationally criticised because of the lack of real prosecutions of these crimes. Almost none of the murder cases makes it to a Mexican court, even though the Inter-American Court on Human Rights obliged the Mexican government in a ruling in 2009 to seriously investigate and take measures to stop feminicides.

Instead of being reduced though, the opposite has taken place. Since President Felipe Calderón began the so called "war on drugs" in 2006, violence against women has escalated along with violence more generally. NGOs report that violent attacks against women increased by 300%. That the new President Peña Nieto will improve the situation is not very likely: in the federal state where he was previously Governor, feminicides increased greatly during his term.

Sunday 20th September 2012

Impunity in Guerrero

We travel to the federal state of Guerrero and meet there several human rights organisations and victims of human rights violations. Guerrero is one of the poorest of the Mexican states and is at the same time one of the regions where the so called war on drugs is extremely violent. Violence is unfortunately nothing new in Guerrero. The state has been dominated by the military ever since the 1970s. In this time it was deployed against armed leftist groups and alleged Guerilla fighters. The militarisation of the society and the repression by the army have led to a huge number of desaparecidos forzados (disappeared persons). As of today there has still been no properly solved case and it is only in recent years that the Mexican government finally recognised the existence of the phenomenon. In this context, the activist Tita Rodilla told us of her fight with the Mexican legal system to reach justice for her father. Protracted by the military, her ongoing fight has already lasted for over 30 years.

Today the army is still in control of the land and society, under the pretences of the war on drugs. While in other Mexican states the drug war targets the control of transit routes, cultivation of drugs plays a very big role in Guerrero.



However, instead of protecting the people from the gangs, the military is deeply involved in the violence, often with impunity. One of the few victims to raise her voice is Valentina Rosendo, who was raped by soldiers. Despite harassment and threats that have forced her to move several times and live in constant fear, she has continued her fight for justice. When her case finally ended up at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, it sided with Valentina. The government had to finally formally present its excuses. This is a great success – but the offenders have still not been sentenced and there has not yet been a formal process in Mexico.

These two examples are symbolic of the high rate of impunity that pervades life in Guerrero and all over Mexico.

Human Rights defenders under siege

The number and severity of human rights violations in Mexico has increased dramatically during the last years. Kidnapped journalists, beheaded corpses and terror against the population are a daily occurence.

Moreover, the massive military presence in the context of the "war on drugs" has not led to more security but on the contrary, to a deterioration of the situation in many places.

The case of the deaths of human rights defenders Betty Carino and Finnish national Jyri Jaakkola shocked the world in 2010. A human rights caravan they were a part of tried at that time to protect the indigenous community of San Juan Copola in the state Oaxaca from paramilitary assault. It was itself attacked and Betty and Jyri were killed. As of today, there have still been no convictions.

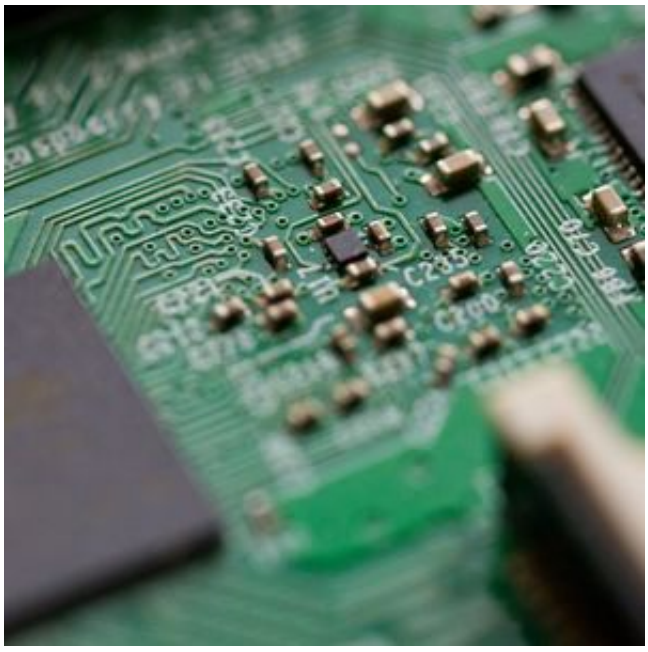
As well as indigenous people, women, human rights activists and especially migrants are victims of arbitrary violence. Often, they travel through Mexico from Central American countries on their way to the USA. In Mexico, they experience kidnapping, blackmailing and even murder and can count on the state even less because of their "illegal" status.

Green MEPs Satu Hassi and Ska Keller will meet and talk to victims and human rights activists to become more informed about the most recent situation. Equally, they will meet with representatives of the outgoing and new government in order to put pressure on them to speed up the ongoing investigations concerning human rights violations. Solving the case of Betty and Jyri must play a key role in that.

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