

AI Index: PRE 01/210/2008
01 August 2008

CASE STUDIES Mexico: Women's struggle for safety and justice

Marcela

On 31 August 2005, Marcela Blumenkron Romero's former husband broke into her home in Hermosillo, Sonora state, and stabbed her. The attack left her paralyzed for four months and with serious long-term nerve damage and limited mobility.

On numerous occasions over the years, she had made emergency calls to police reporting threats and harassment by her former husband and she filed more than 10 complaints at the public prosecutor's office. Every time, she was refused protection. Prosecutors advised her to resolve the issue directly with her former husband, whom she divorced 13 years ago.

The former husband was arrested after the stabbing and prosecuted for attempted murder; no charges were brought for years of threats and sexual harassment. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay damages to Marcela but he was declared insolvent. Marcela never received any compensation and has to maintain her three children with a small monthly fund.

Marcela fears for her safety when he is released from prison as she believes he will kill her.

Teresa

In October 2006, Teresa filed a complaint for physical assault against her brother with the public prosecutor's office in the community of Alpuyeca, Morelos state.

The official received her complaint while holding a separate conversation on a telephone and concluded by telling her that it would be best if she and her brother could be reconciled. She was given a summons to deliver to her brother requiring him to attend a reconciliation meeting. The brother subsequently went to the prosecutor and struck a verbal agreement with his sister. Teresa was told: "Don't file an official complaint. He's your brother. He is going to cause problems." The agreement was that the brother would cover the bill for the private doctor Teresa had seen for treatment of her injuries and the price of a new pair of glasses to replace the pair he had broken.

No official medical report was taken of Teresa's injuries, nor was the case registered, despite the fact that the brother had attacked her on previous occasions.

Mericia

Mericia Hernández López, a young teacher and mother of a six-month-old baby, disappeared from her home on the outskirts of Oaxaca City on 21 August 2005. Her sister, Adela Hernández, concerned at her disappearance, visited the home Mericia Hernández shared with her husband. He said she had left to do a teaching job, but did not know where or when she would return. Adela Hernández tried to file a complaint with the local public prosecutor's office, but was told not to worry as her sister would return home soon. On Adela Hernández' insistence, an investigation was finally opened eight days after Mericia Hernández went missing.

Adela Hernández described to Amnesty International how it was left to her to approach neighbours for information and evidence. Some had reportedly witnessed incidents of violence against Mericia Hernández but were reluctant to come forward, fearing reprisals. Neither the police nor prosecutors interviewed these witnesses. Seven months after her disappearance forensic scientists examined Mericia Hernández's home, but found no evidence. Prosecutors told Adela Hernández that there was nothing more they could do.

Mericia Hernández's whereabouts remain unknown at the time of writing. Her family continues to struggle to get a full investigation into her disappearance.