

PUBLIC

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14 May 2007

UA 111/07 Fear for safety

MEXICO Lydia Cacho (f), journalist, human rights defender

A car carrying human rights defender Lydia Cacho was reportedly tampered with on 7 May in an attempt to cause a fatal accident, in Mexico City. She was not hurt, but Amnesty International believes her life is in danger: her work as a journalist has led to repeated harassment and threats.

Lydia Cacho had arrived at Mexico City airport with several other journalists, on a flight from Ciudad Juarez. She was also accompanied by three agents of the Federal Investigation Agency (*Agencia Federal de Investigación*, AFI) who have been protecting her since she received death threats in 2005 and 2006 (see UA 37/05, AMR 41/004/2005, 16 February 2005, and follow-ups). The group was met by another AFI agent, who gave the keys of a Chevrolet Suburban 4x4 to one of the AFI agents protecting her, so they could drive her to the centre of Mexico City. The vehicle was the property of the Federal Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR). Lydia Cacho offered the other journalists a lift. While the AFI agent was driving into Mexico City along one of the main highways, the car reportedly began to shake violently, almost causing the driver to lose control, so he pulled over and stopped.

At first the people in the car thought they had a puncture, but the AFI agent checked the car and noticed that the bolts of one of the wheels appeared to have been sawn down, causing the wheel to come loose. The driver reportedly said that if he had not stopped the wheel would have come off shortly after, potentially causing a serious accident.

Lydia Cacho has filed an official complaint with the PGR, indicating that she believes the car was intentionally sabotaged in order to kill her. In her complaint she noted a possible link with the publication of her book, *Los Demonios del Edén*, which documented allegations that powerful businessmen had been involved in child prostitution and trafficking. On 2 May she had given evidence at a hearing of the trial of one of the businessmen identified in her book. The hearing was reportedly extremely heated, with the defendant's lawyers seeking to attack Lydia Cacho's credibility. Since publicising the apparent attempt on her life, officials from Puebla state have sought to discredit her and question her human rights work.

In December 2005 Lydia Cacho had been arrested in Cancún and taken to Puebla City to face defamation charges filed by another businessman in connection with the publication of *Los Demonios del Edén*. According to her testimony, during the 20-hour drive to Puebla, the police officers with her implied that she might suffer ill-treatment, sexual assault and "disappearance". On arriving in Puebla City she was held for several more hours before being released on bail to await trial.

On 14 February 2006, audiotapes were leaked to the media reportedly containing telephone conversations between senior government officials in Puebla, including the governor, and a leading businessman. In one of these conversations, recorded in late 2005, the Governor allegedly agrees to organize the arrest of Lydia Cacho. The tape caused a major public outcry at the apparently illegal conduct of senior officials and increased concern for the safety of Lydia Cacho. The National Supreme Court is undertaking an investigation into the alleged violation of Lydia Cacho's constitutional rights.

In February 2007 the defamation charges against Lydia Cacho were dropped. In April she spoke at AI USA's annual general meeting and was awarded a prize in recognition of her defence of human rights.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Lydia Cacho, who escaped an apparent attempt to kill her on 7 May;
- calling on the authorities to order a full review of the protection provided for her, in order to guarantee her safety;
- calling for a full, impartial and prompt investigation into the apparent attempt to cause the vehicle in which she was travelling to crash on 7 May, and for the results to be made public;

APPEALS TO:

Federal Attorney General

Lic. Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza, Procurador General de la Republica,
Procuraduría General de la República, Paseo de la Reforma nº 211-213, Piso 16,
Col. Cuauhtémoc, Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P. 06500, Mexico

Fax: +52 55 53 46 09 08 (if voice answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")

E-mail: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx

Salutation: Señor Procurador General/Dear Attorney General

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Francisco Javier Ramírez Acuña
Secretario de Gobernación, Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P.06600, Mexico

Fax: +52 55 5093 3414

Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear Minister

Federal District Attorney General

Lic. Rodolfo Félix Cárdenas
Procurador General de Justicia del Distrito Federal
Gral. Gabriel Hernández # 56, 5º piso
Col. Doctores, C.P. 06720, Mexico

Fax: +52 55 5345 5558

Salutation: Señor Procurador/Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

CIAM - Human rights organization

Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres - CIAM Cancún A.C.
Calle 12 poniente · 66, SMZA 63 Cancún Quintana Roo 77500, Mexico

and to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 June 2007.