

# JUSTICE IN MEXICO

TRANS-BORDER INSTITUTE, USD

---

News Report  
Number 1  
17 to 31 of March, 2006

## ORDER

### POLICE PROFESSIONALIZATION

Not all news about cops in Mexico City assumes the worst about the capital's police agencies, notwithstanding one insensitive headline that informed recently: "More cops die in sleep than on streets" – a veiled indictment against purported sloth. Coinciding with Mexico City's hosting last week of an international public safety conference, news items publicized studies asserting that chronically poor pay, daily abuse from citizens, and a patronage-fueled promotions structure – and not necessarily endemic laziness – hinder officers from properly carrying out police duties. In a similarly positive fashion, editors elsewhere directed a spotlight onto Mexico City's judicial police officers, who participate in specialized nocturnal weapons training as part of the capital's ongoing fight against professional kidnapping bands. Articles dotted the press last week on the following: the need in the capital for a viable community policing model, along the lines of programs in Argentina and Colombia; progress toward a standardized, confidential, and nationwide hotline to denounce crime and perpetrators; and a decision by officials in contiguous Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí states to share information related to "most wanted" criminals.

#### Sources:

[El Norte 03-25-2006](#)

[Reforma 03-26-2006 "Afinan la puntería en combate nocturno"](#)

[Reforma 03-28-2006 "Urgen a profesionalizar a policías" Juan Corona Reforma: Reforma 03-28-2006](#)

["Afecta calidad de vida labor policiaca" Juan Corona Reforma: Reforma 03-28-2006; "Urgen a profesionalizar a policías" Juan Corona Reforma](#)

### JUDICIAL REFORM:

The long-running debate on comprehensive judicial reform makes appearances in the papers this week, with news articles and op/ed pieces focusing mainly on the creation of an independent public prosecutor's office. Despite broad support for the principle of a more "autonomous" prosecutor's

---

office, political parties are in far less agreement regarding the particulars of any such reforms. Currently, about a dozen separate legislative initiatives circulate in Congress, each with a plan to make the Ministerio Publico a less politicized and more vigorous prosecutor of crime. But analysts warn that provisions in many proposed bills, which are aimed at changing the selection and ratification procedure of federal attorneys general, won't eliminate party politics from the process. For example one such proposal, from the PRI, would grant civil society groups a role in selecting nominees for attorney general, perhaps over the objections of the president who currently enjoys the exclusive right to nominate. The interest in boosting the independence of Mexican prosecutors and in enhancing their discretion to try and investigate cases has come amid recent high-profile scandals. In Puebla and in the State of Mexico, state attorneys general have been accused of deliberately turning a blind eye to illegal activities allegedly committed by their state governors.

Sources:

[Rea Gomez, Daniela. La Autonomía que falta. Enfoque. Reforma. March 12 2006](#)  
[Carbonell, Miguel y Enrique Ochoa Reza. La Justicia Pendiente. Enfoque. Reforma. March 19/2006](#)

## Accountability

### INSTITUTO FEDERAL DE ACCESO A LA INFORMACIÓN (FEDERAL INSTITUTE TO ACCESS OF PUBLIC INFORMATION):

Mexico's new freedom-of-information agency, known as IFAI, came under criticism on the *Reforma* op/ed pages last week. Juan Ciudadano, a pseudonym for a group of citizen advocates, portended IFAI mushrooming into a bloated bureaucracy, should it win budgetary autonomy and be granted guaranteed yearly revenue in the federal spending bill. Appearing March 20, the regular column, written in the form of a letter to the editor, goes on to question the efficacy of the agency and criticizes it for employing vague and "conceptual" commercials instead of detailed public service announcements to inform citizens about the new data that are ostensibly at their disposal. In another column published the same day, writer Roberto Zamarripa pointedly questions the judgment of IFAI not to divulge the photo of a crusading journalist's alleged killer. In a column bordering on satire, Zamarripa severely criticizes IFAI, which stands for the Federal Access to Information Institute, for its decision not to force the Army to release a photo of alleged assassin Heriberto Lazcano. Said to belong to the lethal Zeta mercenary squad of turncoat soldiers, Lazcano is accused in the 2004 murder of journalist Francisco Ortiz Franco, who had reported on drug trafficking for a crusading Tijuana newspaper. Zamarripa marvels at the verdict reached by IFAI commissioners whose vote against divulging the photo is attributed to concern for the privacy of the alleged hit man, also known as "The Hangman." The "absurdity" of the March 15 hearing is compounded, Zamarripa says, by the fact that Lazcano's image already exists in the public domain: on the Federal Attorney General's "Most Wanted" website.

Sources:

[Ciudadano, Juan. Obesidad del IFAI. Reforma 20 March. 2006](#)  
[Zamarripa Roberto "Tolvanera": Certificados. Reforma 20 March. 2006](#)

---

## Access to Justice

### THE LIDIA CACHO CASE

The detention and reported harassment of investigative journalist Lidia Cacho, author of an exposé on child pornography in Mexico, has fueled debate this week on whether the nation's Supreme Court should exercise its power to investigate civil rights violations. Cacho was jailed earlier this year on defamation-related charges, which is a criminal offense in Mexico, after publication of her book, *The Demons of Eden*, led to widespread accusations of child prostitution involving government officials and well-placed businessmen in south-central Puebla state. In a brazen arrest that her advocates say was meant to intimidate, Cacho was removed from Cancún, where she made her home, taken on an almost 24-hour car ride, and forced to appear before a Puebla judge. This took place, in spite of the fact that she was served no official summons and underwent no formal extradition process, civil libertarians say. According to a constitutional expert, the Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, Mexico's highest judiciary body, has the power, vested in constitutional article 97, to investigate presumed civil rights violations. However it is unclear if the court will exercise this power, given that previous attempts to do so in the 1990s and 1970s were ineffectual. Nevertheless, the Cacho arrest could be the "poster child" case the court needs to robustly implement its investigative powers since, in the court of public opinion at least, it is perceived to be an "open and shut" case and Cacho's enemies, most prominently the governor of Puebla, are widely vilified.

#### Sources:

[Reforma \(Enfoque\), March 27, 2006](#)  
[Nodeberia suplir carencias de instituciones públicas, El Universal March 23, 2006](#)  
[La Inacción también implicaría un costo político, El Universal, March 23, 2006](#)