

Minister of the Interior  
Mr. Fernando Francisco Gómez-Mont  
Secretario de Gobernación  
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez,  
Delegación Cuauhtémoc, México D.F.,  
06600, MÉXICO

**Re: Concerns regarding the case of lawyers Mr. Ernesto Rábago Martínez and Ms. Estela Ángeles Mondragón**

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents around one million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it has also observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

We express our greatest concern and horror over the murder of Mr. Ernesto Rábago Martínez, a Mexican lawyer who was killed on 2 March.

According to our information, Mr. Ernesto Rábago Martínez was shot and killed in his office in Chihuahua City, northern Mexico. He and his female partner, Ms. Estela Ángeles Mondragón, had previously been threatened and attacked because of their legal work for an Indigenous community involved in a land dispute. We also have been informed that Ms. Estela Ángeles Mondragón and her daughter are in grave danger.

The two lawyers had been representing a group of Raramuri Indigenous People from the village of Bakéachi, in Carichí municipality, Chihuahua state. We are told that part of the land the group lives on is occupied illegally by ranchers. On 5 February, an Agrarian Tribunal ordered that the ranchers should leave the land and return it to the Indigenous community. Both Ernesto Rábago and Estela Mondragón have supported "Bowerasa", a charity set up to deliver health, education and legal services to the indigenous community of Bakéachi.

On 18 February, the daughter of Ernesto Rábago and Estela Mondragón was shot in the arm while she was sitting in her car parked in the garage of her home. According to Estela Mondragón, the authorities did not investigate the possibility that the attack may be linked to the work of the girl's parents. Before then, Estela Mondragón had reported to the authorities that she had been threatened on several occasions in relation to her work, and that on 28 March 2009 two homemade explosive devices were thrown at Ernesto Rábago and Estela Mondragón's office, setting it on fire. However, no protection measures had been put in place.

The above-mentioned acts seem to us caused by their professional activities, in particular their work defending the rights of indigenous people.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

*Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.*

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

*Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.*

In view of the above, the CCBE urges the Mexican authorities to take immediate and effective steps to investigate the murder of Mr. Ernesto Rábago Martínez and the threats against his surviving partner and daughter and bring those responsible to justice, and also to guarantee the protection of lawyers and their relatives in order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice. We urge you also to ensure that all actions and threats against lawyers for the legitimate exercise of their professional duties are immediately and effectively stopped.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. M. Davó-Fernández', written over a horizontal line.

JOSÉ-MARÍA DAVÓ-FERNÁNDEZ  
President