

PRESIDENT CALDERÓN MEETS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FOR SECURITY

Mexico City, 23 June 2011

Dear Javier Sicilia.

Dear relatives of the victims of violence in this country.

Dear witnesses and affected citizens.

Dear distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak frankly about problems which concern us all.

We of course have differences, but it is important to put them in perspective and to search for commonalities, which I believe outweigh our disagreements.

And I begin by saying that I totally agree with the aims here declared and which give your organisation its name; I also wish for a Mexico of peace, justice and dignity.

I am also saddened by the loss of thousands upon thousands of Mexican lives, especially those of young people.

I too agree that it is not a question of numbers. The emphasis on statistics does not convey the importance of each life, not of even one of the many victims that there have been.

I am saddened by the lives of hundreds of innocent youths so prematurely cut short, such as that of Juan Francisco, your son; I am pained by the deaths of your partners and friends; and I am deeply aggrieved by the loss of more than one thousand murdered local police officers.

I am saddened by the orphans of the 263 soldiers and 409 Federal Police and Ministerial officers killed in the course of their duties, protecting the lives of the Mexican public; some of whom were killed in clashes, but others, the majority, cowardly murdered.

I regret each individual lost, from the death of Gerardo, a police officer murdered beside his patrol car on 11 January 2007; to the death of Raúl, a sailor killed yesterday in a clash with Los Zetas in Zacatecas.

I also regret the thousands of victims of the criminal gangs' homicidal and suicidal violence. The young people who have been recruited on just entering their adolescence, the young people, without hope, who have found death, without ever being sure why; those who met an AK-47, or death itself, before a sincere friend.

I grieve and regret all of these victims. And the innocent victims especially. My countrymen kidnapped and buried in Acapulco; and the youngsters taken in Colima who have not been seen again; and those who have died in armed clashes.

I am pained by the migrants who meet death on their journey, taken by the police and murdered by criminals; I lament the end of their dreams, which died with them. I grieve deeply for the graves of Tamaulipas and Durango, which are like open wounds, not only in the earth, but also in the hearts of all. And even more terribly, I am pained by the hundreds of fathers all over the country who ask me for help, again and again, to find their children, who were one day taken.

I grieve Gerardo Servín, the brother of my best friend, who was taken one day in Morelia, for an alleged debt which he never had, who has not been seen again, and whose case the relevant authorities did not dare to investigate.

I am pained by Fernando, son of Alejandro Martí; and I am pained by Silvia, daughter of Nelson Vargas, because they asked us for help, and yet we could not find them alive.

I am pained by the pain of all the taken, as I was pained by that of Gaby Ulloa and Diego, and I was elated to embrace them upon their return.

I am pained by Edelmiro Cavazos, and all the mayors whose lives those murders have been taken. I am pained by the orphaning of their children.

I am pained by Maribel, my friend, the Secretary of the Council of Uruapan, who was taken two years ago, probably with the complicity of her own friends, and who has not been seen again.

As a father, a Mexican, and President of this country, Mexico's pain is my pain. The hurt caused by the violence, that caused by the criminals, and that caused by the government, and that which any government, by actions and omissions, may have caused.

I know that there are some who affirm that the violence in Mexico today was generated by the state. That it is all the fault, as you have said, of the President who decided to launch the army onto the streets and into this absurd war; and that consequently the solution is to stop this war.

Sincerely, Javier, I think that on this point the premise is incorrect, and that, as a result, the conclusion reached is also incorrect.

It would truly be all the government's fault. If it had nothing to do with the criminals who kidnap, who torture, who kill, and who still hide our missing loved ones.

Does the overwhelming reality of the growth of organised crime not play a part in the violence. You did not mention the frightened towns, which you found on the way here. They didn't tell you anything in Zacatecas about Los Zetas. And in Durango, no one told you anything about El Chapo's people. The anguished families of Torreón didn't chat with you about how their loved ones were kidnapped.

Does the inhuman, bestial violence of the murders not say something? If we at least admit that the criminals are also relevant to this problem of violence in the proportion that they, the violent criminals are responsible for acts of violence.

If the premise is indeed incorrect, then the conclusion also may be. Unless one seriously believes that redeploying Federal Government forces, which in many areas are the only ones countering the criminals, will stop the violence.

It may seem easy to suppose that if the Government were to suspend its activities by withdrawing Federal forces, then the criminals will likewise simply cease to kidnap, extort and murder. That they will no longer recruit young people to satisfy their voracious appetite for control of territories and communities.

I sincerely believe that this is not the case.

But it is fundamentally important that together we analyse what it was that led us to this state of affairs which is so deplorable and painful for all. We must go beyond the dogmas and prejudices which prevent us from seeing clearly, as a united society, this reality.

Such prejudices include the belief that lack of opportunities has no impact on the recruitment of thousands of young people by the underworld, or that the issue of drugs is not a health problem . I believe that it is.

Another is to also presume that all evil comes from the state and to simply maintain the paradigm that identifies the state as the sole generator of violence, as if the criminals and evil, which does exist, and which they embody, did not exist.

I believe the opposite. I believe that it has been fundamentally the actions of the criminals, and not of the state, which have led us here.

And allow me to explain this from different perspectives.

The violence does not result from the presence of Federal Government Forces. Those forces are there because there is violence, a violence which the local authorities could not control, which overwhelmed them. They then asked for Federal help, as in the case of Juárez, where clashes between the cartels preceded the Federal intervention, as was the case in Monterrey and Tamaulipas, where the actions of the state resulted from and did not the cause a pre-existing violence.

I too Javier, have sincerely asked myself: what happened to Mexico, and what was it that led us to this situation which nobody desires. What is it that did not occur before and which does occur now. What was it exactly that precipitated or triggered this malaise which, I think we all agree on again, we want to eradicate.

There is a key to understanding what is happening and I think it is this: the change in recent years of the way in which criminal groups operate.

Yes, it is true that this issue begins with drug trafficking, but in my eyes this is no longer just a drug trafficking problem. It is a problem of violence and organised crime.

And how it started.

For me, the key is that we made the transition from a traditional model of drug trafficking, which basically sought to ship drugs to the United States, to a model of diffused distribution in which the criminals, as well transporting drugs to the other side of the border , also seek to sell them to young people in Mexico.

The differences between drug trafficking and this diffused distribution may appear trivial, perhaps even semantic. However, they are not: they entail radical differences which explain many things. And the difference is as follows: drug trafficking corrupts or intimidates public authorities to pass through. On the other hand, those involved in the diffused distribution of drugs corrupt and intimidate local authorities with the aim of staying in the area.

The former aims to leave quickly and silently, to pass to the other side of the border; the latter aims to infiltrate the locality with the aim of establishing itself as its master, as its most recognised, authoritative and violent entity. To this end it not only murders, but also decapitates; it leaves intimidating messages with the intention that they may be given front-page coverage by some of the media.

Between the old and new models, between pure drug trafficking and its more diffused and pervasive variety, there is a significant difference, which is the problem that has brought us together today; and that significant difference is violence.

Why.

Because in the old model, the aim of the criminals is to control trafficking routes, which may be as numerous as points on the border. On the other hand, in the diffused distribution model, entire territories are the prize, territories which criminals aim to demarcate and whose status is the source of the clashes.

The struggle is territorial, its group on group, it's over the control of towns and populations; it is this violent competition between cartels which generates and initiates the escalation of violence.

The new territorial model is not based on points along the border, but on the control of markets and outlets all over the country; along the border as well as in Acapulco, Cuernavaca, Veracruz and Chiapas.

Worse still, when organised crime controls a territory, it takes over its community; it displaces public authorities by corrupting or killing, and then it goes on to kidnap, extort, attack and rape with impunity.

Why. Because public authorities either no longer exist, or are at their service.

And it is precisely there that I see that the state renounces its essential duty, which is to defend its citizens.

The criminals now wish to be the authorities. That is why they substitute the laws of the legislature with their own laws; that is why they substitute public law enforcement with their own forces; and that is why they substitute the collection of taxes with their own payments. And Javier, that is exactly what we have to prevent.

And did the power of these organisations suddenly grow? Evidently not. Of course not. They had been building hidden power for years and perhaps decades.

The traditional corruption in the Mexican political system, fear, the custom of constant organised criminal presence, of seeing them as an integral part of national life, of co-existing with them,

allowed this plague to gradually eat away at the walls of our national home, and one day the walls collapsed. That is exactly what happened.

What followed, the surge in clashes between gangs, like short circuits electrify the country, are exactly what makes the walls collapse. And it was a force which accumulated due to corruption, fear, private interests, until one day it exploded, like the accumulated energy beneath a volcano which one day erupts. That is how I see what has happened to our Mexico.

And I believe that it is our duty to rebuild the walls, to strengthen the foundations, to rebuild the parts of our national home which have been damaged by crime, corruption and unaccountability.

It is to meet this obligation that Federal Government forces have intervened. The state has come to the aid of local communities and authorities. And contrary to what some have said, that it was irresponsible to act, I sincerely believe that what would truly have been irresponsible would have been not to act.

Yes, the state does indeed have a responsibility, and you are right that through its policies it has not fulfilled its duty to protect the lives of the victims. And in this sense, all of us which make up the state, each according to our degree of responsibility, are responsible, and I agree that we should ask for forgiveness for not protecting the lives of those who have been killed.

But not for having acted against the criminals who are doing the killing, that, definitely, would have been a mistake. In that, Javier, you are mistaken. Yes, it is right to ask for forgiveness for the people who have died, but for not having acted against those criminals who killed them.

But if there is anything which I regret in all of this, it is not having sent Federal Government forces to fight the criminals, who nobody fought either because they were afraid or because they had been bought.

What I do regret however, is not having sent them sooner, of not having had sufficient forces in Cuernavaca, which could have caught the gang which killed Francisco before he lost his life.

My regret is not having acted in all cases with more force. And for that, I apologise.

In that way, what else could be done to answer the cry from the people in all of those communities, who ask for the presence of people who can defend them.

What to do with the business people who face extortion in La Laguna or in Sahuayo.

What to do with the families of the taken, now in Tampico, Durango or Michocán; what to do with the ranchers who are losing their ranches in Coahuila or in Tamaulipas; what to do with the house wives whose cars are robbed in Nuevo León.

What must be done is to act and confront the criminals, and that is what we have done, and what I believe we should do.

The state is also accountable. Of course it is, especially involving complicity and the rampant corruption still present at many levels of the government.

But to omit the fundamental responsibility of the criminals seems to me a great error. Every man is free and responsible for his actions and no one is good, nor bad, per se, he is simply responsible for the good or bad things which he does.

And if this is improper or unfounded from the analysis of the historical sequence of events which I am talking about; if it is true, which it is, that the deployment of Federal Forces followed the onset of violence, and not the other way around, it is even more so from the perspective of the victims, which, I agree, must be acknowledged and publicised. It is truer when you look at the human beings of flesh and blood who have suffered and died.

The youths of Villas de Salvárcar did not lose their lives at the hands of the state. Yes, they lived in a society with an ineffective, corrupt police force, but it was common criminals who cut their lives short.

The same for the youths murdered in the bars of Torreón and the migrants of San Fernando, in Tamaulipas. Yes, they were taken by local police officers and then cruelly murdered by a group of criminals for whom life has simply no value.

In that case the state is accountable for the local police officers who took them and for those who did not act. But the state has also been present, with soldiers and sailors, who, although it is painful to say or hear it, have rescued hundreds of migrants who could have met the same fate.

Rubí Frayre, the daughter of Marisela, lost her life at the hands of a self-confessed criminal, who was freed due to an unforgivable omission of the authorities. It is in such cases of incompetent judges or absurd laws, or in both cases, the state is accountable as it was when the same omission probably led to the death of Marisela Escobedo herself.

But there is also the responsibility of the criminals who in all probability murdered both daughter and mother.

Juan Franciso and his friends were murdered by flesh and blood criminals: by "El Negro Radilla" and "El Jabón"; it was not the state, or the Federal Government which represents it, who murdered them. On the contrary, it was Federal Forces which, one by one, caught those murderers.

And faced with this violence, the state cannot remain indifferent. And what follows is that the state acts and does not retreat. Because as Mexicans, we cannot remain immobile, passive, indolent, quiet.

Perhaps it would have been more convenient for me to have followed the course of events as they unfolded, not to act, to try to ignore reality. But, as President, I saw the threat of the brutal and merciless growth of crime, and I decided to act.

I know that many think that if I had not acted, nothing would have happened. That if I had not taken action against the criminals, all would still be, in inverted commas, well.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. It is as if a cancer sufferer were to think that nothing would have happened if he had not visited the doctor who detected his illness, just in time, incidentally, and began the treatment which could save his life.

The power and violence, the power of the criminals and the violence were increasing at an overwhelming rate.

The first clashes involving the deaths of public officials occurred back in 2004 in Tamaulipas.

That same year, the Americans repealed the law prohibiting the sale of assault weapons, which then began to enter our country by the hundreds of thousands.

The first cases of beheadings occurred in Uruapan and in Acapulco back in 2005.

And what to do when faced with this growing crime wave.

I prefer to take the criticism, unjust though it is, for having acted, than to being left with the burden of conscious of having seen the problem, and for convenience, having done nothing.

Either action had to be taken, or the country had to keep up the pretence that nothing was wrong and that the problem did not exist.

I find the answer, Javier, in your own words, when you quoted Bertolt Brecht: One day they came for the communists, and I said nothing; another day they came for the Jews, and again I said nothing; one day they came for me or for my child, and I had nothing to say.

Mr Sicilia:

I join this call. When they first came, it's true that there were some who neither said nor did anything, I would say that there were many who did not speak and many who did not act. But when the matter came to be in my hands, I acted, with successes and mistakes, but I acted.

And it is not, incidentally, about a fight against drugs in themselves and certainly not a war, as some have insisted on calling it. It is a fight for security; and more than drugs in themselves, which I agree are a central public health problem, what worries me are the destructive effects of the violence generated by the production, trafficking and distribution of substances and by the myriad crimes associated with illicit trade.

As I have pointed out, it is about a struggle to build a country based on the rule of law so that all Mexicans may fully exercise their rights, without the threat which organised crime poses today.

And whilst I am President I will always be open to reviewing that strategy; always ready to rectify errors and employ alternatives. But I will also always be determined to defend all right up to the most modest country families who are being extorted, the mothers who cannot find their children, the people who see that their community has fallen into the hands of criminals and do not have any nearby authority to defend them.

Whilst I have authority, I will defend them, by all means, and that means with all the strength of the state. That does not exclude all that we have to do in other areas.

The strategy which we have followed has three components: One, confront and subdue the criminals.

Two. Rebuild the intuitions which have been eaten away by organised crime; particularly the police and ministerial forces across the country.

And third. The most important, is to rebuild the social fabric, and in that I also agree with you; the social fabric has also been eaten away and can only be rebuilt by providing opportunities for young people. Additionally, with a clear conscious I can say to you that, there too, we have also acted.

Never, never in four years, in the history of the country have we build 91 new universities; never, more than 800 secondary schools; never, more than 1,000 new clinics and hospitals.

And I know that this is insufficient, I know that this is insufficient for a country where half of population is under the age of 27.

I have carefully read the document: For a Mexico at Peace, with Justice and Dignity. I have specific reflections on both the document and on the notes which I was able to take of your addresses here today.

I reiterate what I have said: I ask for forgiveness for the victims which have died and which we could not defend. But not for having acted against the criminals who killed them. And, in that sense, all of us have a responsibility and an obligation.

Second. I also share the conviction that individual cases should be precisely clarified. We will deal with this topic in more detail in another session as I have evidently over run my time.

We have established protocols so that all those who die have a clear and investigation, because we know that behind them is a name, a family, a life.

And that is why we need to preserve their memories, and I am ready to forward a mechanism which allows civil society to participate in their memories, in that reconstruction of the victims.

And with this, although I reserve the right to further expand further on the document in another session, I also agree with you. I am in agreement that this violence must be stopped. But it must be stopped without leaving the country and its communities poorer and more defenceless in the hands of criminals.

We must stop this violence without falling, as many in this country already have, for fear or corruption, into indolence and blatant complicity. Frankly, that is not for me.

I sincerely thank you, the leadership you have had, and all of the Movement for a Mexico at Peace, with Justice and Dignity.

And I am attentive, of course, to the declarations of the victims who are here today.

Thank you very much.

