

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

The truth about the war on drugs

The attorney general has called for popular support, while organized crime is murdering top police officers.

Just as occurred 10 years ago, when the government of the Mexican Republic declared a national war against the drug mafia which had turned the country into the principal exporter of heroin to the United States, the government of President Miguel de la Madrid is facing a similar problem but on a different scale.

In effect, during the last 12 months the international illegal-drug trafficking interests have exponentially increased the growing, marketing, and smuggling of dope on Mexican territory, either through direct cultivation or by using Mexico as a means of access to the United States. This phenomenon has not gone unperceived by the government; indeed, it has been taken as a direct and intolerable aggression. In turn, voices from the National Action Party have charged that the Mexican government is complicit in the narcotics traffic. But such an outrageously baseless opinion has not been put out by any other public or private entity of the country.

The cry of alarm was sent up by the attorney general, Sergio García Ramírez, last Oct. 12, speaking to the national coordinators of the anti-drug battle, when he charged that drug trafficking is "a cunning, merciless, corrosive kind of crime, endowed with great resources by which it is trying to fight us with the same force or *more* than we employ to destroy it." At that time, the attorney general made an unusual appeal to citizen groups which denounce drug pushing privately or

sotto voce, to do it in such a way that "it is transformed into a national clamor," so that they become "the great army fighting against drug traffic which attacks the whole of society." He added that in this way "we can, with relative speed and facility, give the dope traffic the answer that this aggressive criminality deserves."

The dramatic declaration by the high Mexican official reflected the ruthless war which the international drug traffickers have launched against Mexico's judicial and police authorities.

On Oct. 9, the second in command of the Federal Judicial Police (PJF), Samuel Barocio Mascarenas, was assassinated while raiding the safehouse of a network of Colombian and Bolivian drug runners whose Mexican partners had been captured in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Torreón, in a crack-down against an extensive network smuggling cocaine to the United States.

On Oct. 15, Major Ceferino Ojeda, chief of police in Culiacán, the capital of the state of Sinaloa, was gunned down by a narco-terrorist commando which ambushed him in the center of town. Culiacán used to be known around the world as the "Little Chicago" because of the gun-fights in the streets between rival drug-trafficking bands.

The assassination was carried out with AK-47 machine guns, which experts say were possibly of Chinese, Russian, East German, or Czechoslo-

vakian make. The drug gangs use these weapons for special executions and mainly for the "narcs" of Sinaloa state. How these weapons are getting into Mexico is a subject of debate.

Major Ojeda was distinguished as part of a group of honest and incorruptible law enforcement officials who had fought drug running as well as its political tentacles in both the radical-communist left and the extreme right. Another member of this group, Commander Guadalupe Leyva, was murdered by the drug mafia on almost the same day one year earlier in 1983.

At the beginning of November, an even more serious atrocity took place against the chief of the Interpol group of the Federal Judicial Police, Jorge Miguel Aldana, when his helicopter was shot down in a battle against drug runners in the mountains of the state of Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico. Aldana distinguished himself by his enthusiasm in fighting drugs. Nonetheless, at the beginning of January it became known that Commander Aldana had asked for an indefinite leave of absence as the chief of the PJF's narcotics squad.

Then, in early February, it was learned that the second in command of the PJF, who replaced the murdered Barocio in October, had been assassinated at the hands of the drug traffickers fighting the police in a village of the state of Colima, on the Pacific coast. During the burial ceremony, Attorney General García Ramírez stated that many criticisms are made in Mexico against the police, but the honest cops struck down in the fight against organized crime are not honored.

Some analysts of these events see a conspiracy to crush the police officials directly involved in fighting drugs in Mexico. But soon, there will be some surprises.