

## **Mexicans are uneasy about America's outsourced war on drugs**

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**The Guardian**

**14 Jun 2011**

Many believe that Calderón's drug policies have been imposed by the US, which provides aid under the Mérida Initiative

Cipriana Jurado is a Mexican activist who for years struggled to assert the rights of [maquila](#) workers in Ciudad Juárez on the US border. She directed the Centre for Research and Worker Solidarity until, in mid-March 2010, she took refuge in the United States and applied for asylum because her life was in danger. On Saturday 11 June 2011, the United States granted her political asylum.

Her asylum application was accepted on the basis of evidence that the Mexican army persecuted her after she sought to defend a family from which three members, including two women, disappeared in Chihuahua in late 2009. The Mexican army has been used in Chihuahua as part of the federal anti-drug strategy, and it has been repeatedly linked to human rights violations.

Cipriana Jurado is the first human rights defender to receive political asylum for being persecuted by the Mexican army – the same army the United States is supporting to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in the war against drugs.

Her asylum sets a precedent. It also illustrates the complex relations between [Mexico](#) and the United States in the war on drugs. This complexity, according to President Felipe Calderón, revolves around "the fact that we live next to the biggest consumer of drugs in the world and everybody wants to sell drugs through our door or our window and additionally this same friend [the United States] sells weapons to all the criminals".

Many Mexicans are convinced that Calderón's drug war has been imposed by Washington, which aims to get Mexicans to resolve a US problem. Instead of fighting drug trafficking in the territory of the United States, Washington has persuaded or pressured the Mexican government to do it within their country – "outsourcing" the fight against drugs.

Although there are many co-operation agreements in the fight against drugs between the two nations, many of them long-standing, the most recent international security treaty signed by Mexico and the US (and also the countries of Central America) is the [Mérida Initiative](#). The agreement was accepted by the US Congress in June 2008 with an aid package pledge of \$1.6bn (£1bn), over a period of three years. During the first year, Mexico received \$400m in equipment and training.

The assessment of this treaty has provoked a bitter debate within Mexico. Just this past 11 May, Calderón thanked Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi for aiding Mexico through the plan. However, former president Vicente Fox – a member of the ruling National Action party – said on 13 June that the Mérida Initiative is "nothing more than a 'tip' given to us, paid in

blood, death and violence – the task is theirs, to stop drugs from circulating in the United States".

A citizens' movement, the National Movement for Peace, has recently taken shape, challenging Calderón's drug war and opposing the militarisation of the country. The poet [Javier Sicilia](#) started the movement after the murder of his son on 28 March 2011. The movement will include actions of peaceful civil resistance, including the co-ordinated closings of border bridges and a trade boycott against US companies, if the United States does not help to stop the violence.

Many members of this movement consider the Mérida Initiative to be an act by which Mexico is ceding its sovereignty to the US. The initiative has formalised American intervention in Mexican national security, intelligence, crime fighting, the training and command of military forces and police, the patrol of Mexico's airspace, land and sea, as well as logistics and procurement.

On 11 June, after completing a week-long peace caravan through the parts of the country most affected by drug violence, Sicilia demanded that Washington suspend the Mérida Initiative and recognise that its drug policy is destructive to Mexico and Central and South America. The White House has responded by publicly supporting the government of Felipe Calderón. But it has also winked at the National Movement for Peace. Less than a week ago the state department spokesman Mark Toner said the "US supports the caravan's message for peace, especially in Mexico where society as a whole has been touched by violence".

Diplomatic relations between the United States have historically been complex and difficult. The war against drugs will, undoubtedly, make them much more turbulent. Last Saturday, President Calderón delivered the keynote speech at Stanford university's graduation ceremony. While delivering his speech to thousands of graduates, an aeroplane flew over the university stadium, brandishing a sign that read: "No more blood. 40,000 dead. How many more?". It's one more indicator that the tone in US-Mexican relations has changed.

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