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Mexico report slams probe of US reporter's death

The Associated Press

Published: September 28, 2008

MEXICO CITY: State and federal police have mishandled investigations of the 2006 slaying of a U.S. journalist-activist, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission said Sunday.

The commission said in a statement that its own probe of the Bradley Roland Will killing found Oaxaca state investigators failed to interview witnesses, collect relevant evidence or complete an autopsy of Will.

The 36-year-old reporter for indymedia.org was fatally shot in October 2006 while filming a clash between protesters and gunmen on the outskirts of Oaxaca City.

The conflict in Oaxaca began as a strike by teachers seeking higher pay. It quickly grew into a broader movement including Indian groups, students, farmers and left-leaning activists, who claimed Gov. Ulises Ruiz rigged his electoral victory and repressed opponents. At least nine other people were killed in the violence.

State investigators arrested two town officials in Will's killing but later released them after then-state Attorney General Lizbeth Cana suggested that he may have been shot by someone in the group of protesters he was accompanying at the time.

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The commission said its own analysis found Will's shooter was at least 100 feet (30 meters) away from him.

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Oaxaca state investigators "reached conclusions without any scientific or technical support ... when they tried to determine the time, place and distance of the shooting," the commission's report said.

In 2007, federal investigators took over the case after complaints of wrongdoing by state officials.

But they also have mishandled their probe, the commission said, by suggesting — without providing any evidence — that protesters near Will could have shot him, and for backing the state's contention that the shooter could not have been 100 feet away.

Federal agents have not yet released the results of their investigation, but commission members had access to investigators' files.

The commission urged Ruiz to open an investigation of the state police officers assigned to the case because of their "omissions and deficiencies."

It also called on Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora to expedite the probe and investigate possible misconduct by federal agents.

The commission has powers to recommend but not oblige authorities to remedy violations.

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Rina Castelnuovo for The New York Times

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