

Testimony of  
**Jorge Luis Aguirre**

March 17, 2009

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Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs and  
Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control  
Law Enforcement Responses to Mexican Drug Cartels  
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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, Chairman Feinstein, Ranking Member Grassley, members of the Subcommittee and members of the Caucus: I thank you for inviting me to testify firsthand about some of the suffering and death that people who live along the border between the state of Chihuahua, Mexico and Texas face on a daily basis.

It must be difficult for you to get an inside view of the belly of the beast from here and to understand the devastating corruption that devours Ciudad Juárez, where violence has erased all authority and government from the map and replaced it with a dictatorship of the crime underworld.

Starting a few months back, the government of Chihuahua allowed the State to be converted into an instrument of organized crime. Press freedom is threatened by a terrifying dilemma: 'Plata o Plomo,' meaning accept a bribe or face a bullet!

I am exiled from my country and staying in El Paso with my wife and three children legally on a temporary visa because of this violence. Thanks to God and the hospitality of this blessed country, which really cannot be underestimated, I am still alive.

The story of my exile began on November 13, 2008, when Armando Rodriguez, a friend and journalist at El Diario, was shot dead outside his home. That night, when I was driving to Armando's wake in my pickup truck, my cell phone rang. I was at a busy intersection and waiting for the light to turn green, so I took the call.

Recalling the conversation still scares me:

"Jorge Luis Aguirre?" asked a man with an eerie voice.

"Yes?" I said.

"You're next, son of a [expletive deleted]!" yelled the man.

I almost went into a state of shock. I didn't know if it was sweat or a cold chill that was running through my body. I thought I was going to be riddled with bullets right there.

I looked all around, expecting to see rifles pointing at my head, but didn't see anything. The cars started moving and I accelerated too, turning around to head back home. On the way, I called my wife and, without giving her any details because I didn't want her to worry, I asked her to pick me up on a quiet road where I would be waiting on foot. I told her to bring our sons as well. That night, we crossed the border in my wife's car and thankfully saved our lives.

Weeks later, I confirmed the source of the threats. Victor Valencia, a representative of the governor of the state of Chihuahua, had sent people to warn me to 'tone down' my criticisms of the Prosecutor, Patricia Gonzalez, because if I didn't, he was going to kill me, using the Juárez drug cartels' preferred method of kidnapping followed by execution.

In early December, Victor Valencia called and threatened the woman who had passed along his messages before. She is a U.S. citizen and lives in El Paso. Victor Valencia told her that Patricia Gonzales was very upset with me, and that she was going to come after her and me in El Paso to kidnap us and murder us in Juárez.

For obvious reasons, my return to Juárez would be a death sentence. I would likely face fire from AK-47s upon crossing the border into Mexico.

I am sure you are wondering what has happened in Ciudad Juárez since I received these threats. In Mexico, it is an aggravated crime to investigate serious political offenses. Those who try to investigate them can lose their jobs or even be executed.

Impunity rules. There has been no order or government for many years now. In the desert, innocent people - women, men, teenagers and children - die, sometimes buried alive.

Today, I live in exile in a foreign country in order to avoid being murdered for my work as a journalist. I left my office, my house, my friends and several years of my life dedicated to work. In contrast, those who persecuted me are still in their government positions, using public money to try to attain their objectives of becoming a representative, mayor of Juárez or governor of Chihuahua State.

On a daily basis, ordinary citizens in Juárez are condemned to die, to be kidnapped, to be assaulted, to suffer extortion or to be exiled at any moment. Who can help them if they are persecuted and threatened? Criminals, police and politicians are often one and the same. People are more afraid of the police than of the drug cartels.

The press has been silenced both by force and through self-censorship. My exile is a taboo subject in Chihuahua. It is not mentioned by legislators, political parties, ombudsmen or the press.

The violence in Juárez crossed the border into the United States a long time ago. For this reason, I continue to live in hiding in El Paso. Every day, I pray with my wife because God has kept me alive.

Sometimes, I look at the mountains of Juárez and, like many people, dream of a city that is no longer a paradise for drug cartels, but a safe and dignified place where I can live with my family.

God bless America, God bless Mexico, God bless Ciudad Juárez!

\* Translated from Spanish.