



**For Immediate Release**

## **No justice for Mexican journalist and torture survivor Olivier Acuña on International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

**2 November 2016** – International human rights organisation REDRESS calls for an end to impunity in the case of journalist Olivier Acuña Barba, who was arbitrarily arrested and subsequently tortured along with two of his neighbours by agents of the elite corps of the ministerial police (PME) of Sinaloa, Mexico. The renewed call for justice coincides with the United Nations (UN) International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

Torture and other violations of human rights against the three detainees were confirmed in recommendation 7/06 of the Human Rights Commission of the State of Sinaloa on 7 March 2006. Torture had earlier been confirmed by a group of specialist doctors led by Dr Jorge de la Peña Martínez, acting on behalf of the NGO Freedom House, who had carried out a medico-legal investigation in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol – a set of international guidelines for the assessment of torture and ill treatment.

Despite this, no one has ever been investigated, arrested or sanctioned for the crimes committed against Mr Acuña, even though he has suffered torture, arbitrary detention, police harassment and has lost his home, his possessions, and his valuable journalistic files and has been forced to live in exile since 2010.

Mr Acuña reports that plain-clothed ministerial police agents broke into his home on 14 January 2006, harassed and intimidated his wife and two children, then violently committed a false arrest. He subsequently was subjected to simulated drowning or "waterboarding", was beaten, and received threats that he and his family would be executed. Olivier endured 16 hours of torture.

Allegations against Mr Acuña made by his captors were that he murdered 19-year-old Loreto Antonio Carvajal on 5 October 2005. However, the reason for Acuña's torture and ill-treatment relates to his journalistic investigations into Mexican state corruption and organised crime, published in *Sinaloa 2000* – a newspaper he produced and printed himself. Olivier alleged collusion between organised crime syndicates and the ministerial police, including their involvement in killings, drug trafficking and car theft.

Despite an appeal by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention for his release, Olivier and one of the two other detainees who were arrested with him, spent a total of 28 months in jail. Olivier was eventually released after being cleared of all charges. The third detainee, Javier Estrada, was convicted and sentenced for the murder of Mr Carvajal, despite significant irregularities in the judicial process. After

his release, Mr Acuña was subjected to further harassment and was eventually forced to flee his home in Culiacan, before moving out of the Sinaloa region, and then Mexico itself, in fear for his and his family's safety.

*"Olivier Acuña Barba literally lost everything merely for doing his job as a journalist, and exposing corruption and organised crime in Mexico. The failure of the Mexican State to investigate his torture and continued harassment, despite the large body of evidence, is in violation of the Convention Against Torture which Mexico has ratified, and a devastating blow to the principles of journalism and a free press. The UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists is a reminder that this should not and must not be tolerated,"* said Carla Ferstman, Director of REDRESS.

REDRESS and the Mexican NGO ARTICLE 19 are supporting Olivier's case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to seek accountability and reparations from Mexico.

**For further information or for an interview, please contact:** Eva Sanchis, REDRESS Communications Officer, at [eva@redress.org](mailto:eva@redress.org); +44 (0) 207 793 1777 (office) and +44 07857110076 (mobile).

**About REDRESS:**

REDRESS is an award winning human rights organisation based in London and The Hague which works internationally to combat torture by seeking justice and reparation for torture survivors. Since 1992, it has consistently fought for the rights of torture survivors and their families around the world. REDRESS has intervened in a range of leading torture cases.

**About the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists:**

2 November was proclaimed as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists by United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/163, adopted at its 68th session in 2013. The Resolution urges Member States to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy and effective investigations into all alleged violence against journalists and media workers falling within their jurisdiction and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies. It also calls on States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists. The date was chosen in commemoration of the assassination of two French journalists in Mali on 2 November 2013. For more information, see: <http://www.un.org/en/events/journalists/>

**About the situation of journalists in Mexico:** According to a report from the Mexican NGO Article 19 published in February 2016, Mexico is one of the countries with the highest number of disappeared journalists in the world, with 23 journalists disappeared from 2003 to 2015. According to Article 19, "there has been total impunity" in all these cases. The report can be read in Spanish here: <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38261/Mexico--Informe-Especial-sobre-Periodistas-Desaparecidos-%5bFeb-2016%5d.pdf>