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Venezuela: anti-police impunity activist assassinated

El Libertario editorial collective

November 27, 2009

On the morning of 26/11/2009, Mijail Martínez – 24 years old – was assassinated in the city of Barquisimeto, Lara state. Martínez was a cameraman and activist with the Victims' Committee Against Impunity in Lara state (*commonly referred to as CVCI-Lara in Spanish – translator*). According to witnesses, two persons unknown attacked Mijail outside his front door, and after calling his name several times they fired several shots into his chest area. The victim was an audiovisual producer who worked on the television programme of his father, Victor Martínez, a longtime Bolivarian militant and former representative on the region's Legislative Council. Demonstrating the contradictions within the so called "Bolivarian process", Victor had recently been making a series of official complaints in which he had implicated a whole host of important, high up governmental and police figures in corruption and human rights violations.

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Victor told the media that he believes that there was a political motive to the murder, and that it represents an attempt to silence him: “Chávez, I helped you when you were imprisoned and abandoned and noone gave you the time of day,” he said, “yet you are clearly responsible for the death of my son and many other crimes, because instead of being the most fervent defender of the Constitution, you violate it. As a result, all Venezuelans suffer from the insecurity that there is in this country”.

This political attack must be understood within a regional context of degradation at every level of government. As human rights organisations such as Provea have detailed, the state police in Lara have the second worst record nationally for human rights violations, accumulating 19.4% of all cases in 2008, with a total of 31 victims. State police have also been accused of participating in extortion, bank robberies, kidnappings and the production and trafficking of drugs in Barquisimeto, activities which overwhelmingly affect the poor.

The chronic situation in Lara has led to the formation of a number of popular organisations, one being the CVCI, which was founded in 2004. The CVCI has denounced the involvement of high-ranking regional officials – such as Rodríguez Figuera, the former police commander – in the creation of police mafias, alongside Luis Reyes Reyes, the previous state governor, who also participated and then covered his role up. Instead of investigating the official complaints, federal government rewarded the ex-governor, putting him in charge of the Ministry of Popular Power for the Presidential Secretary (*which enforces Chávez’ edicts in national Congress – translator*).

Due to their reports and demonstrations, CVCI activists have received a number of death threats and a number of attempts to criminalise their work. Mijail Martínez had been recording on video the organisation’s public activities with the intention of making a documentary about the members’ experiences. Some of his work can be found at www.vimeo.com (in Spanish).

El Libertario denounce this event as the latest chapter in the government’s attack against base-level, autonomous, revolutionary and dissident organisations. We also send our messages of condolence and hurt to Mijail’s family and friends. Mijail was a young man, committed to social struggle, and we can personally testify as to his enthusiasm and comradely nature. We also consider this crime to be just one part of the criminalisation of popular protest undertaken by a government which is subservient to globalised capitalism.

Finally, we denounce the complicity of the government, of the media at both local and pseudo-“community” levels, of the Attorney General, the Ombudsman and the Justice Courts for any action that puts in jeopardy the life and/or integrity of Victor Martínez and his family, other CVCI activists and members of other popular social struggles within the state which have registered complaints – complete with full names – against the involvement of police and state functionaries in corruption, drug-trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and assassination in the Central-Western region of the country.