

MEXICO - Politics Stands in the Way of Solution to Oaxaca Crisis

Diego Cevallos, IPS

Tuesday 24 October 2006, posted by [Manuela Garza Ascencio](#)

IPS - Out of incapacity or due to political commitments, the government of Vicente Fox and the Senate have failed to put an end to the five-month crisis in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, where 10 people — mainly protesters — have been killed and hundreds of demonstrators are still camped out on the streets and squares of the state capital.

There is no solution in sight to the conflict, which has dragged on for 151 days. Observers blame the government's political weakness and the political deals woven by the governing National Action Party (PAN) with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the run-up to the Dec. 1 inauguration of president-elect Felipe Calderón, of the PAN.

Although local officials are no longer governing in much of the state of Oaxaca, the courts are hardly working and the police are no longer present, the PRI and the PAN, the two strongest parties in the Senate, decided Thursday not to remove Governor Ulises Ruiz.

The Senate decided in a 74-31 vote that the state government had not ceased to function, which meant there was no reason to dismiss the governor.

The removal or resignation of Ruiz, who is accused of corruption, authoritarianism, squelching opposition by means of violence and intimidation and undue use of force against peaceful demonstrators, is the central demand of the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO), the movement that has occupied the centre of the capital of Oaxaca, one of Mexico's poorest states, for the past five months.

"The Senate decision is a disgrace, so the conflict will continue, with a risk of violence," APPO spokesman Florentino López told IPS by telephone from Oaxaca, stressing that the movement will not back down from its demand that Ruiz be removed or step down.

In their resolution, reached after more than four hours of debate, the senators acknowledged the gravity of the crisis in Oaxaca and admitted that Ruiz's continued presence in office was not conducive to a return to normalcy. However, on the basis of legal arguments, they stopped short of forcing him to leave office.

PAN legislators and Fox administration officials are putting strong pressure on the weakened and discredited Ruiz to resign or take a leave of absence. They are doing so by means of emissaries, meetings and phone calls, IPS was told.

"We don't want problems with the PRI because of this Oaxaca business, and we know that in that party they don't want Ruiz anymore either. The best thing is for the governor to go on leave," a source close to the Fox administration told IPS.

Ruiz belongs to the PRI, which ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000, and continues to govern Oaxaca. He was elected in 2004 in elections that opponents say were rigged.

The president has promised not to leave the conflict unsolved when he hands over the reins to Calderón, and has even warned that he might call out the police to crack down on APPO.

Maintaining a strong alliance with the PRI is essential for the president-elect, who according to the leftist

Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) — the second-strongest force in Congress as a whole — won the Jul. 2 elections by fraud.

Calderón has met on several occasions with PRD leaders, and has stated that his cabinet may include several leaders of the PRI.

The state governors who belong to the PRI — who govern 17 of Mexico's 32 states — are demanding that Ruiz remain in his post.

PRI Senator Jesús Murillo said that if Ruiz is ousted, a negative precedent would be set for the rest of the state governors and even for Calderón, whose legitimacy as president-elect continues to be challenged by the left.

The Fox administration and the senators have demonstrated their absolute incapacity to deal with the crisis in Oaxaca, whether due to omission or because of murky backroom deals, wrote Miguel Granados, a columnist for the daily Reforma newspaper and the leftist weekly Proceso.

The conflict in that state broke out in May when the local branch of the national teachers' union went on strike to demand higher wages, camping out in the central square of the city of Oaxaca.

But in June, when Ruiz called out the police to crack down on the teachers' protest, the social unrest began to grow into a broad-based movement, and APPO spontaneously emerged as an umbrella group linking 350 different social organisations.

APPO has occupied government buildings and private radio stations, while its members are camped out in Oaxaca parks, squares and streets, demanding that Ruiz step down.

The federal government has been negotiating with APPO and has promised better wages for teachers.

The leader of the local teachers' union, Enrique Rueda, announced Thursday that the union's 70,000 members in the state will hold an assembly this weekend to set the date for the start of classes. Oaxaca's 1.3 million public schoolchildren were unable to start the school year in September due to the strike.

But the announcement of the possible end of the teachers' strike upset APPO. The local radio station La Ley, occupied and run by the movement, criticised Rueda on Thursday and Friday, and urged the teachers not to call off the strike.

"We will respect what the teachers decide in their assembly, but we warn that the protests will continue until Ruiz leaves," said López.

"We are not going to just let him get away with his crimes, repression and corruption," he added.

Wednesday's drive-by shooting of Pánfilo Hernández, a teacher who belonged to APPO, brought to 10 the number of people killed so far in the conflict. Most of the victims have been APPO members. According to human rights groups, the killers are soldiers and police officers in civilian clothes, as well as hired killers contracted by local authorities.

Other victims were Marcos García, Andrés Santiago, Pedro Martínez, Pablo Martínez, Jaime René Calva, José Jiménez, Lorenzo San Pablo, Arcadio Hernández and Alejandro García.

Oaxaca residents and APPO supporters, meanwhile, have seized suspected criminals and police officers, beating them and tying them to posts in city squares.

But while the senators stated Thursday that the conditions necessary for restoring order and normalcy in Oaxaca would not be possible if Ruiz remains in his post, they did not use their authority to remove him.

<http://www.ipsnews.org/news.asp?idnews=35184>