

## **Supporting the Rule of Law in Mexico**

**By Greg Zoeller and Lee H. Hamilton**

When blessed with the justice system we are privileged to enjoy in Indiana and the United States, it is easy to take for granted the freedoms, rights and protections embodied in our founding principles such as our Constitution. One only need look south to our neighbors in Mexico to see the serious problems that occur when a system of justice is in crisis, under attack by criminals and undermined from within.

In recent months, it has been disturbing to watch the horrific violence and bloodshed in Mexico as the war escalates between organized, well-funded drug cartels and the Mexican federal government. Law-abiding civilians who want only to lead quiet lives free of violence often become victims of this drug war. After a summer of grisly killings in Northern Mexico near the U.S. border, last month 72 migrant workers were found executed in Tamaulipas, victims of the drug-war slaughter. Mayors, political candidates and investigators have been assassinated, and the Mexican news media often self-censors, out of fear of retaliation if it reports the details of killings.

Amid this loss of basic order, Mexico's police agencies, under great stress, have fallen short and its criminal court system is unable to fully cope with the violence, meaning the guilty too often escape justice and the innocent are wrongly accused.

In light of the economic ties of trade and the concerns about illegal immigration, drug trafficking and human smuggling into our country, it is clear that Mexico's problems are Indiana's problems as well. It seems to us that as attorneys and public servants, we have a duty to assist our beleaguered neighbors.

To that end, the Indiana Attorney General's Office has agreed to participate in a program Congress funded that will provide training assistance to legal professionals in Mexico who want to fundamentally reform their justice system. This comes as Mexico transitions from a Spanish inquisitional style of justice to an American-style legal system of oral argument under a 2008 amendment to the Mexican Constitution.

Under an agreement signed by Indiana's Attorney General, Greg Zoeller, and the Attorney General of the Mexican state of Baja California, Rommel Moreno Manjarrez, officials from Mexico will be brought to Indiana the week of September 26 to learn more about criminal justice in our state and federal systems. During this "Rule of Law" program, 40 prosecutors and 40 police investigators from Mexico will be trained by deputy attorneys general, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers from throughout Indiana about the workings of our courts and our legal procedures.

This training is funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development and not through state tax dollars, but the benefit to Hoosiers is that it will provide for our Mexican visitors a concrete example of a legal system that enjoys public legitimacy and stability. Our experience inside and outside of Congress has convinced us that such exchanges can encourage reform.

We must support the efforts of other countries who hope to model their efforts upon our own judicial system, which although not perfect, has stood the test of time and has been a beacon of hope to many. And we should have a greater appreciation for our own law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges who work hard every day to provide for Indiana's system of justice.

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