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AUGUST 16, 2007

Where there's a Will

Durbin presses for State Department investigation into journalist's murder

BY [R. L. NAVE](#)

Joining several other lawmakers, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin has requested an investigation into the shooting death of freelance journalist and Illinois native Brad Will.

A native of Kenilworth, Ill., Will was documenting social upheaval in the Mexican state of Oaxaca when he was shot and killed last fall when police opened fire on protesters [see John Ross, "The killing of Brad Will," Aug. 9].

In a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last month, Durbin asked the State Department to pressure the Mexican federal government to investigate the death of Will and four others who died on Oct. 27, 2006.

"I understand that murder is a state crime in Mexico. However, since sufficient action has not been taken on the state level, I urge you to press the Mexican federal government to swiftly complete a thorough investigation of the killing of Bradley Will and the Oaxaca protesters," Durbin writes.

Two days after Will's murder, a local prosecutor issued warrants for two police officers seen on video firing in Will's direction. Two weeks later, the officers were freed and the prosecutor instead blamed protesters for Will's death.

Renata Rendón, Amnesty International's advocacy director for the Americas, says that she heard about Will's case when she traveled to Mexico in December.

When she returned to Washington, D.C., she began scheduling meetings on Capitol Hill and corresponding with Will's family.

"I raised Brad's case in the broader context of social unrest in Mexico, the violent trend to silence people speaking out about injustice, and Mexico's weak criminal-justice system," Rendón says.

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Brad Will, a native of Kenilworth, was videotaping a demonstration in Oaxaca when he was gunned down.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WILL FAMILY

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In his letter to Rice, Illinois' senior senator writes: "The killing of Bradley Will took place in an environment that your 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices says is 'extremely dangerous' for journalists."

Nine reporters were murdered in Mexico last year, says Reporters Without Borders, an international organization that advocates for press freedom. Only Iraq was more dangerous for journalists, the group says.

Earlier this year, another Illinois lawmaker, Democratic U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, also sent Rice a letter, signed by three others members of Congress, expressing concern over human-rights abuses in Mexico, including the state of Oaxaca.

Schakowsky asked Rice to call upon Mexico's attorney general, Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza, "to ensure a prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Brad Will and in identifying and prosecuting those responsible for his death."

U.S. Rep. José Serrano, D-N.Y., also wrote to Rice, saying that Will's death poses a larger questions about how aggressively Mexican government would pursue "a cessation of murder, beatings, and torture carried out by police and paramilitary groups in Oaxaca, Guadalajara, San Salvador, and Atenco."

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