

Reporters Without Borders

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Americas - Mexico

Price of a Tweet

After wasted month in prison, two social network users freed, charges dropped

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The Veracruz state prosecutor's office yesterday dropped the terrorism and sabotage charges that it brought against social network users **María de Jesús Bravo** and **Gilberto Martínez Vera** for posting messages on Twitter and Facebook about the possibility of an organized crime attack on a Veracruz school.

Arrested on 25 August, Bravo and Martínez were immediately released. They spent nearly a month in detention facing the possibility of a sentence of 3 to 30 years in prison, a fine equivalent to 750 days of their salaries and suspension of their political rights.

Their release came one day after the Veracruz state congress approved an amendment to the state criminal code under which a "public order disturbance" will be punishable by one to four years in prison and a fine of up to 1,000 days of salary. Their lawyer, Claribel Guevara, nonetheless assured Reporters Without Borders there was no link between the amendment and their release.

"This month in prison makes you think," Reporters Without Borders said. "The Veracruz state prosecutor's office wasted a lot of time on this pointless case when it still has to solve three recent [murders](#) of journalists which have made Veracruz one of the most dangerous states for the media this year. Progress is slow in coming in these cases. Meanwhile, we have learned that around 15 journalists have fled into exile in the past two months."

1.09.2011 - Two social network users held on terrorism and sabotage charges

Two social network users, **Gilberto Martínez Vera**, 35, and **María de Jesús Bravo Pagola**, 34, have been detained in Xalapa, in the eastern state of Veracruz, since 25 August on charges of terrorism and sabotage for posting messages on Twitter and Facebook about the possibility of an organized crime attack on a Veracruz school.

They are facing the possibility of a sentence of 3 to 30 years in prison, a fine equivalent to 750 days of their salaries and suspension of their political rights for five years.

"Despite the imprudent nature of some of the messages that Martínez and Bravo posted online, these charges are insane and we call for their immediate release," Reporters Without Borders said. "Under the Veracruz state criminal code, pre-trial detention is supposed to be an exceptional measure, one requiring evidence of the presumed guilt.

"In the absence of any evidence of an intention to 'disturb public order,' 'undermine state authority' or 'seriously disrupt the economic or cultural life of the state,' these two Twitter users have no business being in prison. This case involves both censorship and abuse of authority. Even if the claims they posted online seems dubious or exaggerated, prosecuting social network users on terrorism charges is clearly excessive.

"At the same time, the situation of freedom of information in the state of Veracruz is more alarming by the day. Aside from the many cases of threats and intimidation, three journalists have been murdered in the state since the start of the year: [Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz](#), [Miguel Ángel López Velasco](#) and [Noel López Olguín](#)."

Martínez and Bravo were arrested the same day that they posted their alerts about possible attacks on a Veracruz school, after police identified them through their online accounts.

In a 27 August statement, the Veracruz state public prosecutor's office accused them of intending to provoke "disturbances of the state's social, economic and educative life" and "anxiety and fear reactions in parents." The charges were confirmed yesterday. Fifteen other social network users are also being investigated.

According to a report by the [Grupo Formula](#) news agency, Martínez and Bravo were subjected to psychological pressure during interrogation in an attempt to get them to plead guilty, and were denied access to a lawyer for more than 60 hours. They ended up pleading not guilty and said they had been mistreated by the authorities.

This episode is one more illustration of the way the rule of law is [collapsing](#) as the federal offensive against drug trafficking continues to take its toll on Mexican society. The death toll since December 2006 is now over 45,000.
