

ENTREVISTAS PBI MÉXICO

Núm. XI/2009 • 12 December 2009

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New arrest warrant against David Valtierra, co-founder of the community radio station Radio Ñomndaa, The Word of the Water, in Xochistlahuaca, Guerrero

On 5 November 2009, in a press conference in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, the public was informed about the new arrest warrant against David Valtierra Arango, one of the founders of the community radio station Radio Ñomndaa, The Word of the Water [La Palabra del Agua]. Since its launch in 2004, Radio Ñomndaa has faced legal barriers, acts of harassment, and attempts to dismantle the station, together with the ongoing conflict with the cacique [local political chief] of Xochistlahuaca, Acadeth Rocha Ramírez, and her family. PBI interviewed José Valtierra Arango, David's brother and radio co-founder, to find out about the situation the brothers are currently facing.

PBI: Could you explain the latest incidents to us?

Radio Ñomndaa (RN): The cacique in this region, Acadeth Rocha Ramírez, supported by her people, has arranged for a new arrest warrant to be issued against my brother, David Valtierra Arango. David is one of the founders of Radio Ñomndaa, The Word of the Water. The original case [source of the arrest warrant against David Valtierra and another 32 people] accuses all the social sectors which oppose her politics. At the end of October, I found out that there were arrest warrants against residents of our municipality, including one against David. Among them also are people from other parties in opposition to the PRI and its local member of Congress, Acadeth Rocha Ramírez.

Since then, there have been constant [police] operatives on the road between Ometepec and Xochistlahuaca, and in the entrance to Xochistlahuaca. Ministerial and judicial police officers began to appear and conduct patrols. The police even took local taxis to look for those named in the court case; the people named had to hide for a few days while they attempted to verify their legal situation. On 5 October, the people named in the case made a plea for legal protection. They also held a meeting in

Chilpancingo with the Guerrero State Interior Minister. At its roots, this is a political issue. The people named in the court case are falsely accused with lies, as they oppose the cacique Acadeth Rocha Ramírez's policy of illegitimate appropriation [of public goods].

The cacique and her supporters have set up this case because of an incident that occurred on 2 October 2008, in the days prior to the municipal elections. In the community of Arroyo Grande, Acadeth Rocha Ramírez brother – Ariosto Rocha Ramírez – was detained as he was committing the federal crime of buying votes from the community's residents. Members of the community detained him in order to bring him to justice. A federal law says that the person who commits electoral crimes should be punished, and the government itself publishes this information so citizens will be aware of electoral norms. Ariosto Rocha Ramírez and his brother, José Luis Rocha Ramírez, were buying votes. José Luis managed to escape. In the early morning of 3 October 2008, the investigative police arrived and the community handed Ariosto over to the authorities. Charges were later laid for the crime he had committed.

Justice is sold to the highest bidder, and the cacique with the money – which she has robbed

from the people – buys it. She works in complicity with the people who represent the law, and nothing happens to her. Ariosto is free now and wants to be [municipal] president.

But now [the cacique and her followers] have made a complaint, so that others they consider their enemies will go to gaol, including David. It now has nothing to do with electoral matters. David is part of the radio station, and since its foundation the radio has declared that it will not participate in electoral processes, nor promote any political party. They focussed on David simply because he defends our rights as an indigenous people and he fights for social justice. He has spoken out, reporting and informing the public about the things Acadeth Rocha Ramírez does.

We see ourselves as an alternative media outlet, as a community radio station. We can speak about authorities, about public employees, as they are people who should be reporting back to the community on how they administer or govern. We make their poor management known.



Members of Radio Ñomndaa in the broadcasting booth, Xochistlahuaca, Guerrero. Photo: PBI

PBI: What is the history of the radio station, and the problems it has faced before?

RN: Our radio station is a project that started in 2004. We are a group of people who believe that political parties won't bring change for

indigenous people, so we worked on an autonomous municipality with the traditional authorities. Since then, the cacique has identified us as her enemies, as we have organised ourselves in our own defence, seeking to improve our living conditions. We suffer repression at the hands of the Guerrero government and the federal government.

With the support of the people, we were able to create a community radio station as a tool to reveal the problems we face and to find solutions.

This exposes the authorities, and allows people to see them as they really are – they don't want that. That is why they've tried to silence us in different ways, including attempts to co-opt people (but they haven't managed it yet). There has been a federal operative, as part of the federal government's plan to dismantle community radio stations. Here they tried to carry out the operative, but the people didn't allow them to.

PBI: What effect do court cases have – for example, the current and past arrest warrants against David and others?

RN: It is tiring, and also a form of psychological torture. People lose their jobs, and in certain ways it singles you out. Landing in gaol, whether you're guilty or not, makes you look like a criminal; for people, and for society in general, this is clearly a bad thing.

In the case of our colleagues who fight for social justice, it has been a serious problem. On the one hand, they have to maintain their families; on the other, participate in the people's struggle, not to mention continually defend the law.

Really, justice is bought, and for people who have no money it's exhausting. David has now been going to sign [bail papers]. He has to travel to another community, pay the transport costs and lose the day of work. They do this so people will stop reporting cases and stop fighting, really that's what they want.



David Valtierra Arango and members of the Xochistlahuaca Community Front, all of whom have pending arrest warrants. Photo: PBI

PBI: Why was the first arrest warrant issued against David?

RN: The first accusation, the first arrest warrant, was executed because they fabricated a charge against David for the illegal deprivation of liberty of Narciso Valtierra [not a relative]. They used him because he's an indigenous man who never went to school, he doesn't know how to read or write. Mr Narciso Valtierra stated to the judge in Ometepec that he himself did not write the complaint. He said that they weren't his words, he was only asked to sign the document. He said this to the judge, but in the next hearing he changed his mind – José Luis Rocha Ramírez went with him, and threatened him if he didn't uphold the lies.

That arrest warrant was issued against all the people who were traditional authorities or communal-land authorities [of the *ejido*, communally held lands], including David Valtierra Arango. This was in August 2007. David was gaoled for this crime, he paid bail, and since then the Ometepec court has maintained legal proceedings that are riddled with irregularities. He still has to go and sign [bail papers].

PBI: Could you explain to us the general situation for community radio stations in Mexico?

RN: Across the world, we see that freedom of expression doesn't suit the powerful. They don't want people to talk among themselves or to give their opinion. In Mexico, there is no law which regulates the right [to have community radio stations], which is recognised in international treaties and conventions regarding indigenous people. In Mexico there is a [media] monopoly. It has co-opted the Mexican Congress where laws are made, so the laws are made in favour of the powerful. There is no legal concept for community radio stations; they can't be considered illegal if no concept exists.

Because of this situation, we can no longer wait for the authorities to create such a law. The need is already present. The need to communicate in our own language, the need of citizens to speak their own words can wait no longer. It is a need and a right. We have tried to create the radio station from this need. Not to work against the State, or against the law; that's not what it's about. For us, it is about exercising our rights. We have defended our radio station in a peaceful manner, because we believe it is our right. That's why we cannot stop fighting.

Radio Ñomndaa is an indigenous community radio station which operates independently of the government, political parties and religious groups. Its aim is to see the genuine exercise – as individuals and as an indigenous community -- of the rights to communication, free expression of ideas, and information. They seek to validate, strengthen and disseminate their culture, as well as recognising and respecting the cultural diversity of the Costa Chica region of Guerrero.

For more information on **Radio Ñomndaa**, see their web page: lapalabradelagua.org. Other related articles, in Spanish, appear below:

- *La Jornada*, [Denuncian nueva embestida oficial contra Radio Ñomndaa](#), 3 November 2009.

- *El Sur*, [Giran otra orden de aprehensión contra David Valtierra, coordinador de Radio Ñomndaa](#), 16 November 2009