

Mexico Police Control Rebellious Town

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SAN SALVADOR ATENCO, Mexico -- Hundreds of law enforcement officials fired tear gas and crashed through human barricades to take control of a rebellious town outside Mexico City just before dawn Thursday, hours after protesters released six badly beaten police hostages.

President Vicente Fox condemned the violent uprising by residents of San Salvador Atenco, which erupted Wednesday when inhabitants attacked police in response to the arrest of several of their companions at a market in a nearby town. A teenager was killed in the melee and dozens of people were wounded _ including 33 police, according to Mexican media.

The people of San Salvador Atenco have a history of clashing with authorities; their violent protests in July 2002 stopped government plans to build an international airport in the town, located 15 miles northeast of the capital.

Television broadcasts showed officers repeatedly beating protesters, including some who already had been taken into custody. Mexico's National Human Rights Commission said it is investigating the violence.

Fox pledged to "guarantee the rule of law," though earlier, violent demonstrations by the same group of townspeople have largely gone unpunished.

Authorities detained 117 people, including community leader Ignacio del Valle, said Humberto Benitez, secretary-general of the State of Mexico, which borders Mexico City on three sides.

Del Valle and a fellow resident were charged with the February kidnapping of a state official, said Carlos Mota, spokesman for the Mexico State Superior Court. Mota said del Valle was likely to face charges related to Wednesday's violence as well, although no specific charges had been presented yet.

Shortly before midnight Wednesday, radical community leaders called Red Cross officials to a small clinic near the center of town and released the six state and federal police officers. All had been beaten and some sliced with machetes.

A 14-year-old Atenco resident was killed but the circumstances were unclear, Benitez said.

Rebel leader Subcomandante Marcos said that the Zapatista Liberation Army of southern Mexico would go on red alert to support the town. The Zapatistas staged a brief armed uprising in southernmost Chiapas state in January 1994 to overthrow the government and

demand Indian rights. Since then, the movement has been aimed more at political organization than at armed rebellion.