

Mexico criticized for Oaxaca unrest

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MEXICO CITY --

Mexico's National Human Rights Commission blamed both authorities and protesters Thursday for "excesses" during a months of unrest last year in Oaxaca, and urged the government to investigate its finding that federal police tortured detainees.

In its final report on the unrest in the southern colonial city, the independent governmental commission found that 12 people were killed in the conflict, mostly protesters shot by gunmen. The report also slammed the federal government for not intervening sooner after state authorities were overwhelmed.

What began as a teachers' strike in May 2006 quickly turned into a broader protest in which a coalition of leftist groups occupied the city center for nearly five months to demand the ouster of the Oaxaca state governor.

Shortly after the shooting death of Bradley Roland Will, a 36-year-old journalist-activist from New York who was killed while filming a clash between demonstrators and gunmen, then-President Vicente Fox sent federal troops to evict protesters from the city center.

On Thursday, commission President Jose Luis Soberanes said Fox's administration had "unjustifiably delayed, for more than a month and a half, in complying with its constitutional duty to help restore order and peace in Oaxaca."

The report also criticized the investigation into Will's killing, saying Oaxaca prosecutors had failed to probe the facts or bring a good case against his possible killers.

While the commission has the power only to make recommendations, Soberanes said he hopes current President Felipe Calderon will investigate rights violations including complaints that officers tortured at least 13 people being transported to prison.

In all, the commission received 1,352 complaints of rights violations and found hundreds of them justified, mainly for excessive use of force by police.

But the report also stated that "it is important to note that, without exception, both sides in the confrontation committed excesses. Both the demonstrators and public servants committed aggression."

Soberanes said the protesters, who blockaded the city, had mistreated the people of Oaxaca.

The report found that only one death was directly attributed to the police raid that ended the blockades, but 11 more were closely related - many of them protest supporters killed by unidentified gunmen, as well as one protest opponent slashed to death.

Others died who may not have taken sides in the conflict, such as a motorcyclist who broke his neck when he ran into an unseen cable at a barricade and a person who died in an ambulance blocked by protesters.