

## Asylum for Mexican HR Activist Spotlights Problems in Mexico and the US

Last week, the U.S. government granted asylum to [Cipriana Jurado](#) a Mexican human rights activist who feared persecution by the Mexican army. According to the [Associated Press](#) Ms. Jurado's "friend and long-time human rights colleague Josefina Reyes was gunned down in Juarez in January." Like Ms. Jurado, Ms. Reyes had campaigned against government and gang violence. Not only was Ms. Reyes murdered--killed by unidentified gunmen--several members of her family were [abducted](#) Given the danger, it is not surprising that Ms. Jurado received asylum (not to minimize this accomplishment--only about 2% of asylum cases from Mexico are granted). Ms. Jurado's case, I think, highlights problems in the United States and Mexico caused by the escalating violence across our border.

[caption id="" align="alignleft" width="200" caption="To paraphrase Mr. Franklin: &quot;An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cocaine.&quot;"]



[/caption] First in Mexico: The blatant attacks against human rights workers points to a general disregard for the rule of law. Has the army become just another gang in the on-going turf war? Tens of thousands of people have died as a result of drug and gang violence. The U.S. certainly bears some of the blame, since we are the main consumers of the drugs passing through Mexico and we are the [source](#) of most of the guns used in the violence across our Southern border. Mexico needs to get control of the situation and we need to help. We need to do more to prevent weapons from crossing the border. Also, it wouldn't hurt to try something new in the "war on drugs." Perhaps legalizing certain drugs would help reduce the involvement of criminal gangs, and consequently reduce violence. The website [Law Enforcement Against Prohibition](#) has some good information on the potential benefits of legalizing some controlled substances.

As for the U.S., if Northern Mexico becomes a failed state, the implications for us are pretty severe. One fear is that increasing numbers of people will seek asylum in the United States. The low grant rate for Mexican cases might change if--as in Ms. Jurado's case--the persecutor is the Mexican government (as opposed to criminal gangs, who currently do most of the persecuting across the border). This fear may be mitigated by the fact that--unlike Ms. Jurado--most people persecuted by the Mexican government will likely be involved in criminal activities and thus ineligible for asylum (though still eligible for relief under the UN Convention Against Torture).

It seems to me that a border enforcement-only policy would betray our ideals of protecting bona fide refugees like Ms. Jurado. We can't live up to our ideals simply by trying to keep people out who are fleeing persecution. We need to work more on the prevention side of the equation. If we succeed, we can help reduce the flow of refugees and improve the situation for our Southern neighbor.