



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State 2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Delegate Assembly, and members of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE), I am writing to you today to express our grave concern at the human rights violations taking place in Oaxaca, Mexico and to urge you to take action immediately. The United States cannot sit idly by while these types of tragic events take the lives of our fellow educators and others who have dedicated their lives to the betterment of their community and/or to educating the youth of Oaxaca. They are exercising their right to free expression, a civil liberty.

On June 19, a Mexican police attack on protesting teachers in the community of Nochixtlán in the State of Oaxaca resulted in the deaths of nine people and injuries to more than 100. The teachers and activists were protesting education cuts and the arrests of two teachers' union leaders on what protesters say are trumped-up charges. This incident was only one of many that have occurred over the last several years.

The main goal of NYSABE is to advocate for equitable and meaningful educational opportunities for all English language learners/bilingual learners in New York State. Our members include more than 1000 educators, parents, and community members who advocate for the educational rights of students in New York State. Included among our members and those for whom we advocate, are people who are natives of Mexico or who are of Mexican heritage. Many have family and friends in Oaxaca and other parts of Mexico. (TK: I would make this the 2nd paragraph)

Research by our past President, a distinguished researcher and recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, Dr. Tatyana Kleyn, demonstrates that among the students in Oaxaca are young people who have lived and studied in the United States and in New York. As Oaxaca is the largest indigenous state in Mexico, many of the students speak languages other than Spanish and should have bilingual education programs to meet their needs. The Oaxacan students are our students too, and we cannot remain silent when their teachers, our colleagues, are losing their lives while advocating for them.

As members of an organization of educators and educational advocates, we believe that an attack on teachers, advocates, and supportive community members is not only reprehensible, but it is also an attack on the interests and wellbeing of students. This cannot be tolerated. These teachers and advocates are protesting "education reforms" that have also been the subject of protests in our own state and in our nation. Teachers here and there are fighting for their students. It is unthinkable that they should have to give up their lives to do so.

We urge that you call on the Mexican government to bring an immediate cessation of violence, create an independent commission of inquiry, and engage in talks at the highest levels with all parties involved in the dispute before more lives are affected. It is only through truthful, open communication that such deep-rooted disputes can be resolved.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Tamara O. Alsace

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President

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