

# Mexico's Interpol chief dead in suspicious 'suicide'

by Our Special Correspondent

On Sept. 17, Mexico was stunned by the news of the "suicide" of Commander Florentino Ventura, chief of the anti-drug division of the Attorney General's office, as well as director of the Mexican section of Interpol. His alleged suicide occurred late at night, obscured by the festivities of Mexico's Independence Day, Sept. 16, as well as by the unprecedented speed with which the police authorities acted to "clarify" the case and shelve its investigation. The report filed by Mexico City's judicial police was that Ventura had killed himself after first murdering his wife and a female friend of the couple's, following an alleged drunken fight between Ventura and his wife.

Ventura's death is a serious loss to the dwindling group of civil police who make up the backbone of Mexico's fight against the drug trade. Ventura's record in the battle against drugs, since the 1970s, was the most outstanding of any police officer. During the government of Luis Echeverría (1970-76), Ventura served as an iron-handed prosecutor against the drug trade, during the period when traffickers came under the sharpest attack in Mexico. He helped capture the infamous Alberto Sicilia Falcón, whose marijuana and cocaine network stretching from South and Central Mexico to the United States is considered the predecessor to today's Medellín Cartel.

During the López Portillo government (1976-82), Ventura's anti-drug role was considerably restricted; his battle was re-defined as rooting out government corruption. At the beginning of the present Miguel de la Madrid government, Ventura was the only policeman to agree to personally bring back the former chief of Mexico City's police, Arturo Durazo Moreno. Mafia kingpin Durazo was captured by the FBI in Puerto Rico in early 1984, and then tried on minor charges in Los Angeles, California. Durazo is in a Mexican jail today.

In 1985, Ventura reappeared at the head of the anti-drug fight, when most chiefs of the Federal Judicial Police (in charge of fighting drugs) and the Federal Security Agency (a now defunct Mexican version of the CIA), were forced to resign due to their involvement in a mafia protection racket.

Ventura's anti-drug commandos were famous for their

incorruptibility and for their ability to strike powerful blows against the mafias linked to the Medellín Cartel. As a result, Ventura was repeatedly attacked by drug traffickers, who accused him of being the "DEA's man," or "the gringos' man in Mexico." He was slandered as a torturer. Clearly, Ventura maintained a mutually collaborative relationship with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). His effectiveness was respected at the highest levels of the DEA and Interpol, as well as among police circles throughout the Western world.

## Official version doubted

Since news of his "suicide" first surfaced, that story has been publicly questioned by several political commentators in the Mexican media, in sharp contrast to absolute silence on the matter from police circles, now that an "official version" of the events surrounding Ventura's death has been issued.

Mexico's most important newspaper, *Excelsior*, however, has published several stories designed to demonstrate that the official "suicide" line is absolutely false. On Sept. 20, it ran an interview with the waiters at the place where Ventura had supposedly gotten drunk. They denied that Ventura had been drinking or that he was arguing with his wife, as claimed by the police version. Nor did they recognize Enrique Orozco, whom police indicated as the only witness to the deaths, as the same man who had been with Ventura and his wife on the day of the crime.

The next day, *Excelsior* revealed that the authorities had not even interrogated the waiters to confirm the facts of the case. Nor had the detectives interrogated the first policemen on the scene, the man who had seen the alleged witness. In the same article, Ventura's two children declared categorically about their father's supposed suicide, "We don't believe all those lies." They also questioned why the government of Miguel de la Madrid had closed the case only hours after the events. "Some day we will know the truth," said one of them.

Ventura's death should be analyzed in the light of two important facts which could show that he was assassinated by the Medellín Cartel and its Mexican partners.

1) On Sept. 4, Ventura personally directed a multi-state raid which confiscated 700 kilos of cocaine from Colombia and captured a key man in the Medellín Cartel, the Nicaraguan Hugo Ettiene. Also jailed were two Americans (Mike Baldrike and Patrick Henry), one Mexican (Rafael Abud Osuna), and a Colombian (Hernán Jaramillo Jaramillo). The cocaine was seized in the state of Michoacán, now considered Mexico's most active narcotics trafficking base.

2) On Aug. 15, Ventura led the capture of another Medellín Cartel 700-kilo cocaine shipment. That operation led to the arrest of 17 members of a gang headed by the Colombian William Mayor Arias and his lover, actress Rossy Escudero. It is heard in public and private that a number of influential Mexicans were behind that mafia.

Escudero's arrest provoked a scandal in the press, due to her hot links to top political and entertainment figures. The media gave big play to her charges that she had been raped and tortured by Ventura. On Aug. 20, Ventura responded that she was making charges "in order to undercut the importance of William Mayor, member of the Medellín Cartel."

On Sept. 5, Escudero was quoted in *Quehacer Político* magazine threatening all involved in her capture. She said, "God will punish . . . all those involved in my detention and in my defamation." She alleged she had no relation with William Mayor. Asked if she knew Mayor's movements in relation to the Medellín Cartel, the actress broke into hysterical screams and ended the interview.

Investigators found Mayor ran a sophisticated communications network out of his Mexico City hotel suite, from which he coordinated cocaine flights from Colombia. Escudero had often visited that suite.

A few days before Ventura's "suicide," *Quehacer Político* revealed that Escudero and one José Antonio Curiel Miranda, arrested in the same bust, were part of the drug-trafficking ring run by former Mexico City police chief Arturo Durazo, whom the magazine called the Medellín Cartel's chief partner in Mexico. Durazo had brought in Curiel as his deputy police chief.

Several "Mexicans" caught in Ventura's net were really Bolivians. *Quehacer Político* asks that it be determined who issued them Mexican military registration cards, birth certificates, and passports. "If that were done," it opines, "the Mexican police would deliver a major blow to narcotics traffic, as well as discovering the Mexican crew which aids such crimes."

Escudero was also intimate with Francisco Sahagún Baca, officially Durazo's "chief of crime prevention investigations," but really his right-hand man in criminal activities, according to the weekly. Sahagún Baca is a known narcotics trafficker and assassin. He has been seen in several Mexican cities, but has miraculously never been captured, even though there has been an arrest warrant out for him since De la Madrid took office. Sahagún's operations base is known to be in his native state, Michoacán.

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**Lyndon H.  
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**National  
Television  
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**Saturday, Oct. 1**

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★ ABC network

**10:30 P.M.** Eastern Daylight Time  
and Pacific Daylight Time

**9:30 P.M.** Central Daylight Time

**8:30 P.M.** Mountain Daylight Time

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**Monday, Oct. 3**

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★ CBS network

**11:30 P.M.** Eastern Daylight Time  
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**10:30 P.M.** Central Daylight Time

**9:30 P.M.** Mountain Daylight Time

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