

## **Safety in Mexico with Armonía**

Recently there has been a significant increase in awareness concerning the issues of escalating violence in Mexico. Primarily, this is due to the sudden increase in media coverage portraying Mexico as dangerous. As a result, we at Armonía feel that it is appropriate to communicate to our visitors our perspectives concerning the current situation as those who live and work in Mexico.

### **The Sources**

The news of violence that you most likely have heard may be from either good news sources or alarmist news sources. Many times, the alarmist news sources cannot be completely trusted because they are primarily interested in profit or may be politically charged, so beware. However, even the good news sources often do not provide sufficient background to present the whole situation. For example, when you hear on the news, "Mexico is dangerous," you immediately find yourself in a misunderstanding, because Mexico is a vast country and not a particular location. It is simply untrue that every part of the country is dangerous. In fact, most places in Mexico remain quite safe.

### **The Problems**

Allow us to provide some context for the current problems in Mexico. In reality, there are three main issues causing the violence: drug trafficking, weapon smuggling, and money laundering. The warfare, therefore, is generally limited to a conflict between police, soldiers, and the drug lords and their forces. In addition, the violence is geographically concentrated to the larger border towns, nowhere near the places where Armonía works.

### **The Danger**

It is important to note that these forces (police, soldiers, and drug lords) currently are not targeting civilians or tourists and foreign visitors. The one group of people outside of these forces that has been targeted are the wealthy residing in Mexico, because they are in danger of being kidnapped for the money their ransom can generate. It is important to realize, however, that the targeted wealthy are usually involved in corruption and shady political activities. The only time that civilians and tourists are affected by the violence in Mexico is when they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Consequently, Armonía is fully committed to do all we can to make sure that volunteers and visitors are never in the wrong place at the wrong time.

### **The Solution**

Warning people about visiting Mexico does not reduce the problem of violence. In addition, the action of the Mexican or U.S. military to squelch the forces does not change the social conditions of the problems. So, what are the possible solutions for the problems Mexico faces? Armonía believes that social transformation through the gospel of Jesus Christ ultimately is the only thing that will make a difference and bring true change to the moral situation in Mexico. With that in mind, the Kingdom work that Armonía is doing is more important than ever and must continue to go on. Armonía's partners around the world and visitors that come every year are an indispensable part of this Kingdom work.

### **Ensuring Safety**

There are many things to which Armonía is committed to do in order to ensure the safety of its staff, volunteers, and visitors. It is vital to understand that the communities in which we work are welcoming communities where Armonía has worked for years. We never take visitors to places where Armonía does not have a good, long-standing relationships. There has not been a single incident in any of the areas where we work concerning these issues in the last 15 years.

Ultimately, we know that our wellbeing is in God's hands, and we always trust and ask Him to take care of us. Nevertheless, to be wise, we have always taken these general precautions in order to ensure the maximum level of safety:

*First*, we live and work in enclosed locations with securely locked gates. Both the visitor housing and places of work, namely the community centers, are always securely locked and safe.

*Second*, we avoid going into crowded places during any sort of public demonstration or celebration with political significance, which can be volatile areas. This does not hinder general sight-seeing: for example, we will continue to take groups to the Zocalo (city center) if they so desire, but we would not go during a demonstration.

*Third*, although visiting groups might engage in some sight-seeing activities, Armonía conducts these activities in an inconspicuous manner. Therefore, if Armonía has instructions for your conduct as visitors (i.e. not wearing matching t-shirts), we ask that you follow these instructions without question. Another thing we do to ensure the safety of our visitors is to not use fancy buses and not go to fancy restaurants where the wealthy dine out.

*Fourth*, we always move in public areas where there is plenty of police protection.

*Fifth*, Armonía never takes groups or visitors to risky places or has them engage in any risky tasks. When working at Armonía, the visitors are never anywhere near dangerous locations.

In sum, we want to reiterate that in the places that Armonía works there is no heightened risk to safety. However, even though we want to encourage you to come to Mexico we understand that you and your church/group are the ones who have to make the final decision. However, we would like to strongly encourage you to realize that we need your partnership and coming to visit us is an extremely important part of this relationship in Christ. The kind of task we have been given by the Lord to do in Mexico makes us long for your participation.

In His Name,  
Saul and Pilar Cruz  
Armonia