



Exposing Cancun's Dark Side – Journalist Was Imprisoned after Writing about Alleged Pedophile Ring

By Brian Ross, Jill Rackmill and Dana Hughes

June 21, 2006 — To journalist Lydia Cacho, the Mexican resort of Cancun is no vacation paradise.

Cacho's Cancun is a place where children are at risk from sexual predators, women have few rights, and powerful men influence corrupt officials to do their bidding.

Today, Cacho is fighting for her freedom in a Mexican court, all because of a book she wrote about a pedophile ring in Cancun.

She was arrested last December at a women's shelter she runs by several officers who arrived in an unmarked car.

"They came towards me and they said 'Lydia Cacho, you're arrested,'" Cacho said. When she started protesting, the officers became threatening, according to Cacho. "One of them just took a gun and put it in my head and said 'Shut up!'" she said.

"I thought these guys are going to kill me," she added.

The arrest of Lydia Cacho, captured on a surveillance tape, would turn into an international incident. After her arrest, she was taken to prison where, she was told, a plan was already in place to rape, beat and silence her.

Exposing Cancun's underbelly wasn't Cacho's intention when she moved there from Mexico City some 20 years ago. Instead, she expected to write novels and live a peaceful writer's life by the sea.

But Cacho said she soon discovered that behind the paradise lurked extreme poverty and oppression. She began writing about and speaking out against domestic abuse and rape, eventually becoming a rape counselor and opening a high-security shelter that takes in and protects the battered wives, girlfriends and children of powerful men. "A lot of the men said, 'OK, if you don't give me my wife back, I will kill you.'"

Her work is dangerous. She must travel in an armored vehicle, accompanied by armed federal agents.

‘My Whole Life I Have Slept With Virgins’

What led to her arrest was her reporting about Jean Succar Kuri, a powerful Cancun businessman and hotel owner who is facing charges of raping and corrupting children.

Succar Kuri lured poor local children to the swimming pool and then to the rooms “making them have sex amongst them and then having sex with him and other friends,” Cacho said. She said he also engaged in child pornography by taking photos of the acts and sending them to his house in Los Angeles and posting them on a website.

In her book, “Demons of Eden,” Cacho interviews Succar Kuri’s alleged victims, including one girl who says she had sex with him when she was 13. Years later she went to police and helped them make an undercover video. In the video, broadcast on Mexican television, Succar Kuri denies abusing the girls but provides a graphic description of his sexual acts with young girls. “It’s my vice, it’s my f—ed up thing,” he says. “My whole life I have slept with virgins.”

After this tape was made public, Succar Kuri fled the country. Mexican authorities put out an international warrant for his arrest and U.S. Marshals finally caught up with him in Arizona, where he awaits extradition.

Succar Kuri told ABC News the videotape was faked, his relations with the girl were consensual and that he is no pedophile. But in her book Cacho explored Succar Kuri’s inner circle including, she says, one of Mexico’s most powerful businessmen.

‘The Denim King’ Fights Back

Cacho writes that the kids mention Mexican businessman Kamel Nacif as Succar Kuri’s protector. Nacif is known in Mexico as the “Denim King,” for his factories that produce fabric for blue jeans.

Kamel Nacif told ABC News that Cacho’s charges are “the most absurd and perverted lie that has ever been written about my person” and that Cacho falsely accused him just to increase her book sales. He has filed a defamation charge against her, which can be a criminal offense in Mexico.

Cacho says she soon saw firsthand the kind of power Nacif could wield, as police drove her from Cancun across the country to a prison in Nacif’s home state of Puebla. “They kept talking amongst them about rape. You know? How people get raped in jail,” she says. “And they kept looking at me like this and going like ‘Oh, how come a beautiful woman like you is picking a fight with this very famous Kamel Nacif?’”

But it wasn’t until a secret recording of a telephone call was made public that she says she fully understood the events behind her arrest.

A Mexican radio station obtained a tape of phone conversations by Kamel Nacif, where he is using vulgarities to describe Cacho. “They are on their way to pick up that f—ing bitch in Cancun right now,” he’s heard telling a friend. On another call, Nacif tells a friend Cacho will face a tough time behind bars. When the friend suggests Nacif pay a woman in jail to rape Cacho, he tells the friend that, “everything is already in place,” and that “she is with the psychos and the lesbians.”

'My Precious Governor'

Kamel Nacif's reach extended to some of the highest levels of the Mexican government. In one phone call, Nacif talks to the powerful governor of the state of Puebla, Mario Marin. The two seem to be congratulating each other, with Nacif calling him, "my precious Governor" and Marin promising that Cacho will be punished.

"I finished nailing that f---ing bitch yesterday. I told her that in Puebla the law is respected," Marin says on the recordings. "I sent her a message; now let's see how she responds."

Nacif then promises the governor that "a beautiful bottle of cognac," is on the way, as a thank you present.

Kamel Nacif refused to comment on the tapes when they became public, saying that they were recorded illegally and that Lydia Cacho was not hurt. But when he spoke to ABC News he had harsh words for Cacho's reporting. "I would call her what she is, a perverse journalist and a liar with no evidence," he said.

Some human rights activists say the secret recordings provide a rare glimpse of the danger journalists face in Mexico, where 16 reporters have been murdered in the last six years.

"For her to be thrown in jail for something she wrote is absolutely ridiculous," says Daniel Wilkinson of Human Rights Watch.

"It is very important in this context that there are journalists who are willing to stand by their convictions for what they wrote and face the charges and face the people who appear to be trying to intimidate them," he said.

After Cacho was freed on bail, her showdown with the powerful made her a national hero and a cultural icon. Her case was spoofed on a TV comedy show, and inspired a video game and a nightclub song, "My Precious Governor," which excerpts the secret recordings.

In a historic turn of events, the Mexico Supreme Court is investigating whether Lydia Cacho's rights were violated.

But she still faces the possibility of jail for her stories about Cancun's dark side. And, she says, she still fears for her life. But she has no plans to back down.

"I am willing to give my life for the things I believe in," declares Cacho. "I am willing to give my life for living in peace, and protecting others, and protecting myself, and for saying out loud that I have rights."

Jose Cohen contributed to this report.

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