

Mexico's own 'WikiLeaks' already making waves

March 18 2015, by Laurent Thomet



Mexican journalist Carmen Aristegui speaks to the press in Mexico City on March 16, 2015, a day after being fired

Mexico's WikiLeaks-inspired whistleblower website is already making waves just days after its launch, even though it has yet to expose any government scandals.

MexicoLeaks was announced by star journalist Carmen Aristegui last

week when she told her audience that her MVS radio team was part of the initiative.

The website uses encryption software to encourage would-be whistleblowers, who would normally fear retaliation, to anonymously send documents to an alliance of news outlets and civic groups in order to expose corruption in a country plagued by graft.

While MexicoLeaks has only begun to receive documents, it was Aristegui's seemingly benign announcement that snowballed into a scandal.

MVS distanced itself from MexicoLeaks and fired two journalists before sacking Aristegui on Sunday, sparking accusations that one of the voices most critical of the government was being muzzled.

Aristegui, 51, revealed last year that President Enrique Pena Nieto's wife had bought a mansion from a government contractor, raising conflict of interest allegations, which the government rejected.

Calling her dismissal an attack on [freedom of speech](#), Aristegui suggested that her firing was planned by someone with "much power." She said her team was investigating the finance minister and the army when they were fired.

Troubling a broadcaster

MVS has denied coming under pressure from the government or seeking to silence Aristegui.

The company says it fired the first two journalists for using the station's name without authorization to promote MexicoLeaks, and that Aristegui was let go because she gave an ultimatum for them to be reinstated.

"The problem is the use of our brand. We have no problem with MexicoLeaks," MVS communications vice president Felipe Chao told AFP.

"MVS does not give up or fold before governments. There is nothing that could get in conflict with freedom of speech," Chao said.

He said the company first heard of MexicoLeaks when Aristegui announced it on the air, and she was unlikely to be reinstated.

The government issued a statement Tuesday saying it hoped Aristegui and MVS resolve their dispute, while stating that it has "constantly respected and valued" the work of journalists.

While Aristegui and MVS feud, MexicoLeaks is quietly amassing documents through its secure website.

The alliance of eight civic groups and [news outlets](#), including national weekly magazine Proceso, website Animal Politico and Aristegui's team, issued a statement denying it was misusing MVS's brand.

"We regret that MVS's decision is based on the (Aristegui) editorial team's participation in the MexicoLeaks alliance, as if the democratic values that inspire this platform—including freedom of speech, right of information, transparency and accountability—trouble this company or affects its interests," the statement said.

First leak coming soon

Discussions to create MexicoLeaks began last year, with the help of Free Press Unlimited, a Dutch-based foundation that helps journalists in conflict zones.

A person with secrets to spill must download a special web browser named Tor, which hides their location, to be able to send them through MexicoLeaks without being detected.

The whistleblower can choose to send the documents to one or more of the eight members of the alliance. The organizations then launch investigations to verify the information before deciding to publish anything.

Eduard Martin-Borregon, a member of the Poder civic group that participates in MexicoLeaks, said his pro-transparency organization is already investigating tips it has received since last week.

"With MexicoLeaks' secure filter system, we hope that many acts of corruption of [human rights violations](#) that occur in Mexico—but are not exposed because people are afraid of reprisals—can be published by the press and prosecuted," he said.

The 30-year-old Catalan refused to give any details about the documents.

But, he said, "I think we won't have to wait too long for the first leak."

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