

To kiss or not to kiss: Mexican city debates

Mexico made an important contribution to world kissing culture with singer Consuelito Velazquez's song 'Besame, besame mucho'.

However, if Guanajuato Mayor Eduardo Romero Hicks had his way, the 'mucho' (a lot) would be struck from one of the best-known songs in the Spanish language.

The right-wing, municipal leader supported an edict banning among others 'Olympic kisses' - that is, all physical contact beyond a normal 'beso' or kiss as well as obscene gestures in public. Violations were to be punished with up to 36 hours in jail and a fine of 1,500 pesos (\$107).

Like many of his mayor colleagues across Mexico, Romero Hicks, of the nationally-ruling conservative National Action Party (PAN), wants to secure safety and cleanliness in his city as well as its citizens wellbeing.

In the small colonial city of Guanajuato with its Spanish architecture and World Heritage Site, there are many street vendors, beggars bother residents and tourists and young people turn to drugs and alcohol.

And of course, in parks and on the romantic streets, the best-known of which is named Callejon del Beso or Kiss Alley, there are occasionally more permissive demonstrations of love. This annoyed the mayor and his party, to whom Mexican President Felipe Calderon belongs.

However, the country and particularly the city, some 300 km south of Mexico City, opposed the move.

'Only the stupidity of a 19th century mayor and of a city council of the Middle Ages could turn kissing into a crime,' analyst Ricardo Aleman complained Sunday in the Mexican daily El Universal.

Even PAN's federal leadership thought the measure went too far or perhaps it was inopportune - six elections for positions of governor are scheduled for this year, along with elections for the lower house of the Mexican Congress.

'PAN is close to being swallowed by an extreme right that is intolerant, not at all democratic, backward and, for everyone's bad luck, a relative of the radical extreme left,' Aleman said, as he predicted likely electoral setbacks.

At the behest of the central government, the governor of Guanajuato, the home state of Calderon's predecessor Vicente Fox, stopped the anti-kiss text from being printed in the state gazette thus preventing it from taking effect.

Now it is set to be rewritten. The PAN leadership in the state of Guanajuato warned its representatives in the city council of sanctions, if they do not follow dispositions from above.

For the Mexican opposition, this is a godsend. Gerardo Fernandez Norona, a leader of the country's left wing and some 30 members of the gay and lesbian community recently demonstrated against 'this barbarity' outside Guanajuato's offices in the capital.

Fernandez Norona called upon demonstrators to kiss each other intensively to show their aversion to the conservative PAN from Guanajuato. However, he himself denied the gay community's coordinator a kiss. Instead, he kissed his 7-year-old niece, the daily Reforma reported.

This is not the first time that a municipal ruling for the preservation of decency has caused a stir in Mexico. A few years ago, the former mayor of Monterrey, the third-largest city in the country, tried in vain to ban the wearing of miniskirts among women.

In the wake of the fuss, Mayor Romero Hicks chose to adopt the name The Kissing Capital, for his city in an advertising campaign to promote tourism in Guanajuato.

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