

B.C. man killed in Mexico feared becoming victim of violent crime

By ANDREA WOO

Ron Mackintosh, found dead Tuesday in Barra de Navidad, had moved from Pacific town where another B.C. man had been murdered

Before Ron Mackintosh moved to Mexico from Courtenay, B.C., he did his homework.

Nearing retirement, the inspector at an engineering firm wanted to live out his days somewhere warmer and more affordable, and had set his sights on the Pacific coast town of Melaque, in the state of Jalisco. The 64-year-old had retreated there many times in the past 20-odd years and developed many friendships.

More importantly, it also seemed to be one of the safer neighbourhoods in a country that all too often makes headlines for violent crime. Encountering violence, said Mr. Mackintosh's long-time friend Wes Klettke, was his biggest fear. In fact, the murder of another B.C. man, Robin Wood, in Melaque earlier this year worried Mr. Mackintosh so much that he moved again, to Barra de Navidad.

Despite his precautions, Mr. Mackintosh's fear was realized. On Tuesday, municipal police discovered his body in Barra de Navidad. Mexican authorities confirm it was a homicide but have released few other details. Friends believe Mr. Mackintosh was likely targeted for his car, a black Jeep. He carried no cash with him, Mr. Klettke said – just his bank and residency cards. The Guadalajara Reporter said he had been tied to a tree.

"It was his greatest fear, for this to happen to him," said an emotional Mr. Klettke on Thursday. "He mentioned it quite often. He'd say, 'God, I don't know what I've done, sometimes, moving down here.' "

Mr. Mackintosh, who lived with his girlfriend, leaves behind two adult children.

Jessica Séguin, a spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs, said in a statement that Canadian officials are providing consular assistance to Mr. Mackintosh's family. As well, consular officials are in contact with local authorities and a local investigation is ongoing, she said.

The death has once again put a spotlight on the issue of tourist safety in Mexico, which gets between 1.5 and two million Canadian visitors each year. In addition to the murders of Mr. Mackintosh and Mr. Wood, who was shot when he interrupted a home invasion, Sheila Nabb, a 37-year-old Calgary woman, was badly beaten in the elevator of a five-star Mazatlan resort in January. In December, the charred bodies of 39-year-old University of B.C. student Ximena Osegueda and her boyfriend Alejandro Santamaria, 38, were found in Oaxaca.

Tourism officials in Mexico have stressed that despite widespread attention on the high-profile murders, such occurrences are rare. The numbers seem to back them up: According to data from Foreign Affairs, on average, two Canadians out of 100,000 visiting Mexico each year are assaulted or killed. That's fewer than Jamaica (3.6 per 100,000), India (7.5 per 100,000), South Africa (five per 100,000) and other countries.

Still, the same department warns against non-essential travel to parts of the country – namely, northern states including Sonora, Durango and Sinaloa – due to high levels of violence linked to organized crime.

Andre Gerolymatos, a Simon Fraser University professor and expert in international security, says while organized crime groups usually avoid tourist areas, that is not always the case.

"Every now and then, they want to punish the government of Mexico because the government's trying to get them out of the way," he said. "What they do is kill tourists as a way of killing the industry."

He cautioned against visiting areas that are known for drug activity, particularly towns that are close to the American border.