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Confronting a nightmare. Disappearances in Mexico. Some illustrative cases

Héctor Rangel Ortiz

Héctor disappeared with **Irene Hugo Hernández** and **Milton Aguilar Torres** on 10 November 2009 in Monclova, Coahuila state. They had travelled there on business from Querétaro. He phoned his family to tell them they had been stopped by municipal police and was going to find out why police had impounded one of their cars. That was the last time they heard from him.

In the following days, his sister and brother travelled to Monclova to look for Héctor, but were warned off by municipal police and state prosecutors who told them “not to raise dust” or the same thing would happen to them. They were repeatedly followed and fled the town fearing for their lives. They continued their quest, but despite commitments to investigate there were no advances. The family pursued its own enquiries and they have been victims of death threats, but have persisted in their search for truth and justice. Héctor Rangel is believed to be a victim of enforced disappearance and his whereabouts remain unknown.

“I will not rest until I find my brother. This search comes from the heart” said Héctor Rangel’s sister, Brenda, during a recent demonstration of relatives of the disappeared.

José Juan Peña Espiricueta, Jesús Fernando Castillo Gallegos, Rubén Limón Ramos

These three men disappeared on 13 March 2011, when they were reportedly detained by municipal police operating in conjunction with a criminal gang in the Colonia Nazario Ortiz, Saltillo, Coahuila state. A dispute between unknown individuals who had entered the neighbourhood and some residents resulted in an armed gang and municipal police arriving to pursue neighbours and detain four local men. One was subsequently released, but the whereabouts of the other three remain unknown.

Relatives searched for the victims. A complaint with the state prosecutor resulted in a visit by investigators to the neighbourhood, but despite witness evidence of police involvement, the whereabouts of the three victims of enforced disappearance have never been established or anyone held to account.

Alejandro Moreno Baca

Alejandro disappeared on 27 January 2011 when he was travelling in his car between Monterrey and Nuevo Laredo in Nuevo León state. His last movements were recorded at a toll booth on the highway near Sabinas and shortly later when he activated an application on his phone which logged his location. He was reportedly stopped a short time later and taken away by an armed gang checking vehicles.

When the family reported their son’s disappearance to the authorities, the victim was simply presumed to be involved with criminal gangs without any investigation. His

parents have campaigned tirelessly for a full investigation in order to establish the fate and whereabouts of their son.

Pamela Leticia Portillo Hernández

This 23-year-old mother of two, disappeared in the early hours of 25 July 2010 in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua. She had been out with friends, including four army officers, and rang her mother to say she would be home after getting a hot dog, but she never returned. At 7am her mother went looking for her and after finding her car abandoned she reported her abduction.

Witnesses later confirmed that Pamela Portillo and an army officer had been abducted by armed men, possibly police, reportedly checking for stolen vehicles. After seeking more information from witnesses, including military officials, her mother found them increasingly unwilling to cooperate. As the official investigation did not advance, her mother continued her own enquiries, but began to receive threats against herself and her family.

Pamela's mother told Amnesty International: "I never thought I would be in this situation. I always used to see them from afar. I used to think, 'poor people, they don't know what happened to their daughters, the disappeared of Ciudad Juárez'". Pamela Portillo's whereabouts remain unknown.