

URGENT ACTION

CASE OF 43 MISSING STUDENTS TO BE REVIEWED

The whereabouts of 42 of the disappeared students remains unknown. The investigation has made some progress but it is mired with flaws. The Mexican authorities have accepted repeated calls from relatives for an international group of experts to review the case. It is crucial that the authorities fully cooperate with the experts.

Forty-three students were subjected to enforced disappearance and six other people (three students and three bystanders) were killed during an attack believed to be perpetrated by local police operating in collusion with criminal gangs on 26 September in the town of Iguala, Guerrero state.

More than 90 people, including the former Mayor of Iguala, police officers, and gang members are being investigated in relation to this crime. On 27 January, the Federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) announced that all students had been killed and burnt to ashes. Nevertheless, forensic experts with access to the investigation pointed out serious flaws in the handling and interpretation of forensic evidence. The PGR reacted by disqualifying the experts, but has failed to address the flaws.

On 3 March, President Peña Nieto appointed a new Federal Attorney General. She will be responsible for continuing the investigation into the disappearances, but she has failed to acknowledge its flaws so far. At the request of victims' families, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has appointed an international group of experts (Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes) who are reviewing the state response to the case. The authorities have agreed to this. It is now crucial that they fully cooperate with the group.

Please write immediately in Spanish, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to take all effective measures necessary to establish the whereabouts of the disappeared students;
- Urging them to fully support the group of experts appointed by the IACHR, by ensuring that they can carry out their review without obstacles and by publicly committing to comply with their recommendations;
- Urging the newly-appointed Federal Attorney General to guarantee a full, prompt and impartial investigation into all the human rights violations committed in this case and bring those responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 MAY 2015 TO:

President of Mexico

Enrique Peña Nieto
Residencia Oficial de los Pinos
Col. Chapultepec, Mexico, D.F.
C.P. 11850, Mexico
Fax: +52 55 5093 4901

Email via website:

<http://en.presidencia.gob.mx/contacto/>:

Twitter: @EPN

Salutation: Dear President / Estimado Señor Presidente

Federal Attorney General

Arely Gómez González
Procuraduría General de la República
Reforma 211-213, Col. Cuauhtémoc
C.P. 06500, Mexico, D.F., Mexico
Fax: +52 55 5346 0908

Email: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx or website

<http://www.pgr.gob.mx/servicios/mail/plantilla.asp?mail=1>

Twitter: @ArelyGomezGiz

Salutation: Dear Attorney General / Estimada Señora Procuradora

And copies to:

Local human rights organization

Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña "Tlachinollan"
Email: accion.urgente@tlachinollan.org

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 246/14. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR41/041/2014/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Some 500 students attend the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teacher Training College (Escuela Normal Rural Raúl Isidro Burgos) in the town of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero state, some 300km south of Mexico City. They receive training to become primary school teachers in rural communities. Some of the local inhabitants are of Indigenous origin. In general, these communities – and the students themselves – are poor and suffer from high levels of discrimination, marginalization and lack of access to basic services.

The students at the rural training college are also politically active and they have staged many demonstrations in relation to rural teachers, education policy and other political issues. Acts of violence have been reported in some of these demonstrations, and the authorities have repeatedly blamed the student. The training colleges have been starved of resources in recent years as rural education has not been a priority.

In December 2011 Ayotzinapa students who were protesting on the main highway outside Chilpancingo, the state capital, were attacked by state and federal police resulting in three deaths, two of them students. At least 24 people suffered torture and other ill-treatment. Those police and superiors responsible for the abuses against students have never been held to account, encouraging a climate of impunity. Amnesty International has highlighted this case many times, most recently in its report *Out of control: Torture and other ill-treatment in Mexico* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR41/020/2014/en/>).

Despite some progress in the Federal Attorney General (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR)'s investigation into this case, some serious flaws have been highlighted. These include excessive reliance on the testimony of four alleged hit-men; lack of adequate and sufficient forensic evidence to back up the PGR's hypothesis; biased interpretation of the available forensic evidence; and failure to secure and protect the alleged crime scene in a prompt and effective manner.

Abductions and disappearances remain routine in Mexico with public officials often acting in collusion with criminal gangs. The 43 students who have been forcibly disappeared since 26 September are part of the more than 22,000 cases of people who are missing or disappeared in Mexico and whose whereabouts remain unknown. In 2013 the Federal Attorney General's Office set up a specialized unit to investigate cases of abductions and disappearances and establish the whereabouts of victims. To date, they have not released any detailed information regarding its effectiveness. For further information see *Confronting a nightmare: Disappearances in Mexico* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR41/025/2013/en/>).

In February, the Mexican government reacted harshly to a UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances report that considered the case of the 43 students as illustrative of the serious challenges the State faces in the prevention, investigation and punishment of enforced disappearances. The Committee concluded that enforced disappearances are widespread in the country.

Further information on UA: 246/14 Index: AMR 41/1221/2015 Issue Date: 23 March 2015