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Mexico urged to protect targeted family following triple killing

Amnesty International has urged the Mexican authorities to provide protection to the family of a murdered human rights activist, after three of her relatives were today found dead.

The bodies of Malena Reyes, Elías Reyes and Elías' wife Luisa Ornelas were discovered at a petrol station east of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state.

The three, who were abducted by armed men on 7 February, are relations of activist Josefina Reyes, who was killed by unidentified gunmen in January 2010.

Her brother Rubén Reyes was also shot dead last year.

“The Reyes family are clearly being targeted in the most brutal way with five family members now dead. The Mexican authorities’ top priority must be to ensure the safety of other relatives,” said Susan Lee, Director of the Americas programme at Amnesty International.

“They must also launch a prompt and thorough investigation and bring to justice those responsible for the killings, which were apparently sparked by Josefina Reyes daring to speak out against the explosion of violence in Mexico.”

Malena Reyes, Elías Reyes and Luisa Ornelas were travelling by truck with Sara Salazar - the mother of the Reyes siblings - and Josefina Reyes’ daughter when they were stopped by armed men two weeks ago.

The group then drove away with the three, leaving Sara Salazar and the young child at the side of the road in Guadalupe Distrito Bravos in the Valle de Juárez.

Sara Salazar has been campaigning for justice for the murder of Josefina and Rubén Reyes, but an investigation by Mexican authorities into their killings has made no apparent progress.

On 15 February, the Reyes family home in Guadalupe was burned down by an armed gang using homemade petrol bombs.

“The authorities must consult the Reyes family and implement measures to protect them while they endure this violent persecution, or we fear that other relatives could also be at risk.” said Susan Lee.

Josefina Reyes had been active in protests against violence in the area being carried out by criminal gangs and human rights violations committed by the military.

In August 2009, she participated in a Forum on Militarization and Repression (Foro Contra la Militarización y la Represión) in Ciudad Juárez, to protest at increasing human rights violations being committed by members of the military.

Her brother Rubén was killed on 18 August 2010 while he was on his way to buy food near his home in Guadalupe Distrito Bravos.

Violence linked to organized crime has spiralled in Mexico since 2007.

More than 30,000 drug cartel-related killings, many carried out in Ciudad Juárez, have been reported in the media.

President Felipe Calderón's administration has attempted to combat the drug cartels by deploying thousands of federal police and more than 50,000 military personnel in the worst-affected areas, but this has not reduced the violence and reports of abuses by the military have significantly increased.