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Massacre in Mexico City; questions remain

Forty years after one of the worst incidents of mass killing in Mexico's history, the Mexican government still hasn't given answers to questions surrounding the massacre that took place in Mexico City, said Amnesty International.

The organization called on Mexican President Felipe Calderón to establish once and for all the truth behind the massacre that took place in La Plaza de Las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco, Mexico City, just days before the 1968 Olympics opened. It also urged the government to provide justice and reparations for the families of the victims.

Estimates vary on how many were killed when the Mexican army opened fire on students peacefully demonstrating in Tlatelolco on 2 October 1968. The massacre began at about 6 pm, when police, military and unidentified armed men surrounded the square and opened fire from armoured cars and tanks, using heavy weapons. They fired on students gathered in the square and on surrounding residential buildings. Forty-four bodies were eventually released by the government – ten have still not been identified.

“Forty years on from the Tlatelolco massacre, so many disturbing questions remain unanswered,” said Javier Zúñiga, now a special advisor at Amnesty International who witnessed the arrival of government troops from a nearby bridge overlooking the square.

“Who ordered the massacre? For how long had it been planned? How many were killed? Who are those whose bodies still have not been identified?”

“It was getting dark at the time the gunfire started, so it was difficult to see exactly what was happening,” recalled Zúñiga. “But I remember, as clearly now as at the time, that the army moved into the square before the gunfire started and not as a consequence of it, as many government sources have maintained. People panicked and started running in different directions crying ‘the army is coming, the army is coming!’ Before long, it seemed as if the square was full with bodies.”

“I went back early the following morning and saw piles of belts and shoes. Pools of blood remained on the ground despite obvious efforts to wash them away. I also saw large bullet holes on concrete pillars at adult head height.”

Despite continuous efforts by victims, relatives and participants in the student movement to establish the truth of what occurred that night, the full facts have never been established and those responsible have not been held to account.

“The failure of the Mexican government to establish the truth of what happened on the night of 2 October

1968 has left a deep scar in Mexican society that can only be healed by full disclosure, bringing the perpetrators to justice, and providing reparations to the victims or their families,” said Kerrie Howard, Deputy Director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

President Calderón’s government has been all but silent on this dark chapter in Mexico’s history,” said Kerrie Howard. “We challenge this administration to open all relevant archives and records, establish a new and independent inquiry, and lift the obstacles preventing those responsible for this horrific crime being brought to justice.”