

THE 43 OF AYOTZINAPA



Photo Credit: CNN Mexico

By:

Miguel Antonio Rodriguez

CRW Researcher & Reporter
November 2014



INTRODUCTION :

On September 26th, 2014, students of the Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa "Raul Isidro Burgos" were violently repressed by the local police force of the town of Iguala – Mexico. The result was 3 dead and over 18 wounded; but what tipped over the last drop for the Mexican population are the resulting 43 students that are missing after allegedly being arrested. It later appeared they were not officially arrested, but instead kidnapped by the local police force.

MEXICO AND MEXICAN HUMAN RIGHTS :

The "United Mexican States", officially known as México, is an independent republic, located south of the United States, yet still in North America. Its estimate in 2013 population was 118,395,054 people and its total area is of 1,972,550 km² (761,606 sq. miles). Its Capital is Mexico City, also referred to as Mexico D.F. (Federal District), has a population which has grown outside of its actual limits, and is calculated to be around the 21 Million, making it one of the most populated capitals in the world.

Since Mexico's independence in 1814, the republic has attempted to create a legal frame to protect individual liberties and to offer individuals guarantee of their civil rights. This was first made official through its first constitution of the same year. The Constitution of Mexico had many changes for the next hundred years, and eventually in 1917 Mexico approved a new Constitution, of which the first 27 articles are specifically elaborated to protect individual freedom and civil rights. Despite of all the legal efforts, nowadays Mexico is known to have made little progress towards Human Rights and Citizen Rights; to the eyes of the international community, Mexico has actually taken significant steps backwards towards some Human Rights topics during the last ten years. Impunity of local police forces has been one of its main issues; the ever growing amount of disappearances, kidnappings, and other crimes which include homicide and assassination, are reportedly directly linked with the Mexican Federal Police, the Mexican Military Forces and other State Agents. The most recent significant Human Rights violation reported in Mexico, that is, before the disappearance of the 43 students in Iguala, was the assassination of 22 people inside an empty warehouse in the municipality of Tlatlaya executed by the Mexican



Military, last June 30th of this year. After long investigation, 7 of members of the military force were convicted and are currently in a military prison, but there still are a significant number of unanswered questions about the event.

MEXICO AND THE DRUG CARTES :

Mexico has a long history of dealing with drugs, starting somewhere in the 1940's when a significant number of Chinese immigrants arrived in the country. They mainly where dedicated to crops, and some of them to the production of opium poppy and marihuana. The local farmers learned the techniques about cultivating both. They were located mainly in Sinaloa. The production kept on growing, and the cartels came to life in the 50's, and were wealthy and fastly growing in the 60's and the 70's. In the 80's they made even more money, since the production of cocaine in Colombia boomed and Mexico was they best way to get it into the United States, were the principal consumers always were. During all this time some isolated events of violence occurred, mostly between cartels or to other mafia-linked businesses. With cocaine, the cartles made a significant bigger income. But it was in 2000 that they peaked, when president Vicente Fox came into power, and did very close to nothing to prevent growth of the drug cartels and their business; furthermore, after what happened in New York on the September 11th, 2001, the United States virtually closed their frontier, the cartels were forced to get rid of their drugs inside of Mexico. This involved a lot of recruitment and restructuring, which led to a lot of violence in Mexico, specially where the most influent cartels were located. Governments after the one of Fox tried to do something about the violent waves of mass murders and other criminal deeds, but the corruption of the government and the police force was too big already. Nowadays it is rumored that all of the biggest political parties of México are financed by the cartels, especially during election time.

THAT NIGHT, WITHOUT MOON :

The afternoon of September 26th of 2014, approximately 100 students of the Teachers University of Ayotzinapa set out form their campus to the city of Iguala. The buses they travelled with where commandeered by them earlier;



commandeering has become commonplace in Mexico, and is viewed as a common succeeding in the State of Guerrero, where both Ayotzinapa and Iguala are located. They were reportedly looking to commandeer more buses which they needed for a even larger group of students, to travel to Mexico City to attend to the memorial act of the 1968 student massacre which took place there. After some time it seems the students were unable to secure more buses for their scheduled trip, thus, started to head out of the city. At around 9:00 PM they were intercepted by local police cars which succeeded to block the third bus. The second was intercepted some block ahead, and the first bus managed to avoid all blockades. According to the testimony of the third bus survivors the police immediately opened fire against them, without ever securing who they were or what they were doing at that time. 2 students were killed during the police attack; and another one is still in a coma. Some of the students managed to escape after the attack, and the rest, which summed up 43 students, were taken away in local police cars by the police themselves. About an hour after the first attack, when some by passers and curious people gathered in the place where the first attack happened, suddenly a second attack took place, but according to witnesses the attackers were not dressed as police officers, but as civilians. They escaped shortly after they opened fire onto the crowd, and killed 3 innocent people during the attack, one of which was a woman which happened to be in a taxi nearby the crime scene. After the second attack, it took local authorities about 3 to 4 hours to appear on the crime scene, leaving the injured and some bleeding on the street, under the rain, in a moonless night.

This notorious violent episode was worsened up by a particular confusion, when the local police force mistook a private bus for one of the student's commandeered buses. They opened fire against them, once again, without making sure who they were or what they were doing. The bus happened to be of a local third division soccer/football team. They wounded 5 of the team members, including the trainer, and killed one of them. According to the testimony of the team members, they just opened fire against them, without any reason or warning whatsoever. When the police realized their mistake they just left them.

That fatidic night 6 people died, and around 25 were injured. The whereabouts of the 43 students missing is still unclear.



IGUALA'S MAYOR AND HIS LINKS WITH THE CARTELS :

After the violent event and disappearance of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa, it took the general attorney office of Mexico 4 days to officially start the investigation of the occurrences, and an arrest of 22 police officers was made. The then mayor of Iguala, José Luis Abarca, asked and was granted a license of 30 days, after of which he escaped Guerrero state, accompanied by his wife, Maria de los Angeles Pineda. The investigation of the General Attorney later showed that there were connections of Abarca with a local cartel, which is a result of the former Beltran Leyva Cartel, now "Guerreros Unidos". It was reported that the brother of the Major's wife was an important agent of Guerreros Unidos, and that the Major's wife, also a public functionary, made possible the bribing of the local police, with money resulting of drug business. Before this link was found, Abarca was one of the principal suspects of being behind the attack of the police to the students. On same date the attack took place, Maria de los Angeles Pineda was supposed to render a report of her functions and to announce her candidacy for Mayor of Iguala for 2015; followed up with a party for all invited attendees. It is theorized that Abarca and/or his wife got aware of the coming of the students and got worried of them interrupting their planned event; reason of which they asked for help to Guerreros Unidos through their links.

RESULT AND MAIN POINTS OF THE INVESTIGATION :

Besides that the international community got aware of this grave event, it was very surprising that until the 6th of October, ten days after what happened in Iguala, the current president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, made a statement about the event. IT was never cleared up why it took the Mexican president so much time to deliver a message, which only announced that the authors should receive the punishment and be judged by their national law; he also sympathized with the parents of the 43 disappeared students, which may have been well intended, but did very little to provide answers or solutions which the parents and families of the disappeared still desperately seek. Later, not a lot of days after the president's declaration, Peña Nieto made an unfortunate remark in another statement, where he declared how proud he was of the local police forces and their intervention in recent events which



happened in the country. Perhaps exaggerated by some, this was interpreted to be a declaration against the party's damaged by the Iguala event.

The people of Ayotzinapa, particularly those related to the Teachers University, distrustful of the Mexican government and authorities of the State of Guerrero, asked the Office of the General Attorney to invite a panel of forensic experts of Argentina, which did arrive to Mexico shortly after and immediately started their investigation. Eventually, and very close to the date of the disappearance, local authorities discovered a mass grave, and directly related them to the disappeared students. When the General Attorney attempted to indicate that they had found the charred bodies of some of the disappeared students, the experts ascertained that it was most improbable, due to some technical facts, and the time of their burial. When the panel made a report to the Governor of the State of Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre, about their investigation, the governor in a press conference reluctantly denied that the found bodies where in any way related to the missing 43 students. As public manifestations and protests started to happen, not only in Mexico City, but in other capitals in Mexico and in the World, the Mexican government started to feel the pressure of making any sort of finding towards the problem. The United Nations, and the Organization of American State, through their Human Rights correspondents, declared the event in Iguala to be of a significant magnitude, recommended to the Mexican government to warrant a thorough and complete investigation and further condemned the disappearance of the 43 students. On the 8th of October around 15.000 people marched in Mexico City supporting the parents and families of the missing students, and demanding answers of the government. Eventually, on the 26th of October the governor of Guerrero State asked for a license, which was granted by the congress of the State.

On the 4th of November Luis Abarca and his wife where found in Mexico City, hiding in what seemed to be an abandoned house. It later appeared that they were patented there by state agents, but this was never confirmed officially. Some days before, the general attorney's office declared that they were sure that it the attack on the student's buses was ordered by Abarca. By the 7th of November, around 35 arrests were made, mostly of police officers, but also of the Guerreros Unidos Cartel. On this date the families of the 43 missing students were told in a meeting with the general attorney's agents that the last arrest of 3 reported members of Guerreros



Unidos confessed to have received a group of people which identified themselves as students, not much time after the disappearance took place, and that after some questioning there were ordered to kill and burn them, close to the town of Cocula, which is relatively close to Iguala. After the burning for a day, they put the ashes and rests of the burned in black garbage plastic bags, and threw them into a close river. This was investigated by the General Attorney's agents, and indeed the bags were found, which allegedly held remains and ashes of charred corpses. The parents and family of the students than told the agents that they did not trust the result of their investigation, and that they wanted the statement to be confirmed by the Argentinian expert panel, but the remains were later sent to Innsbruck, Austria, to confirm that the remains were indeed of the students. Still, the families, the parents and international organization are distrustful of the findings of the general attorney's office, until it is confirmed that the remains are indeed of the students, but the information may still take some time to be conclusive.

Mexicans still claim that the students are alive and being hidden by the Iguala police force, and the Guerreros Unidos cartel, for some unsown reason. The phrase "we lost them whilst they were alive, and alive we want them back" as become symbolic of the disappearance, and is being used a lot on social media and other media, to claim justice for the affected families.

THE MANIFESTATION OF NOVEMBER 20TH :

Since the event of the 26th of September, part of the population of Mexico seems to finally have hit bottom of the situation of the country, the impunity of the crimes of the local police and military, and the corrupt governmental institutions; although, it seems the sentiment is far from being general. A significant proportion of the population is distrustful of its government, and of its legal enforcement agents. Some analysts say that Mexicans have gotten used to the level of corruption, and the sensation of insecurity. Despite of this, the general population is reluctant to do something about the situation, mostly out of fear by retaliation by the drug cartels, or to being arrested without reason by the government forces; the still alive memory of the 2nd of October of 1968 has tattooed their memories deeply.



Even so, November 20th a massive pacific manifestation was held in Mexico City in support of the families and parents of the 43 missing students, now also asking for Peña Nieto's resign as president of Mexico. Reportedly, 100.000 people marched from the symbolic golden Angel, the Independency monument of Mexico, to the "Zócalo", the more important "plaza" of the city. After chanting their protests, some isolated events took place, and the door of the governmental palace was lit on fire; this resulted in them being ejected out of the "Zócalo" by the local police. After investigations, some organizations have reported that the violence was instigated by undercover military forces, well placed in between the people attending the otherwise peaceful protest. The result of the forceful ejection of the "plaza" was the arrest of 11 protesters; which were then immediately charged of stern crimes, such as associating to commit crimes, and other crimes against the state. They were imprisoned and treated as common criminals, and reportedly denied their right to talk or hire their own lawyer but were forced to accept a legal aid lawyer, which did very little for them. The result was more anger and protests among the Mexican population of the capital. The 11 arrested, have all been released after a judge did not find enough proof to keep them imprisoned or to formally accuse them of their alleged crimes. During their imprisonment they suffered some further transgressions to their basic rights, such as not being able to communicate with their families until after their declarations in from of a jurisdictional authority. The formerly arrested were not pressured much, as there was a lot of public attention to them, but this is not uncommon, according to testimonies of former arrested people, due to unfounded reasons, that the police and military put a lot of pressure on those arrested to confess to crimes which were not committed by them or to sign documents without knowing the content of; these seem to be common place a lot of times in the whole of the country.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS :

Corruption, impunity, kidnapping, disappearances, murder and homicide seem to have been a common dish in Mexico for some years now. Mexico has been known in the world for a lot of reasons, mainly their cultural characteristics, their music and their movies, among others, such as its tourism and their hospitality. But ultimately, violence and drug cartels are slowly taking over the once beautiful picture of



Mexico, in the eyes of the international community. Sadly it is perhaps just to say that it is Mexico that the world does not want to become.

It is urgent that activists, organizations and other institutes work together with the government to solve the problems they encounter and aid with policy and law making to improve the solutions. Recently, the image of the president has even lowered after proposing a set of constitutional changes which most of the population realizes, may not even be related much with its current problems. Urgently, Mexico needs to have Mexicans believe in their systems and government again, and this will only be attainable with the progressive improvement of their systems to prevent violence; also to end with impunity and lower the cases or reported violence of state agents against the civil population. Above all, it is time that the people responsible of crimes as relevant as the disappearance of 43 students, mass murders, and other crimes are brought to justice in time, and with the accurate punishments, as dictated by the Mexican law and its Constitution.

As a Latin American it hurts deeply to see where the current path of such an influent country may lead. One can only hope that Mexicans awaken from their long sleep, manage to put away their fears, and find a way to deal with the country's problems, before they become unsolvable.