# Mexican students in Guerrero gunned down by government security forces

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**21 December 2011**

On December 16, more than 5,000 protesters marched in Chipancingo, Guerrero, demanding the impeachment and trial of Governor Angel Aguirre Rivero for ordering the killing of two rural student teachers last Monday.

The marchers included contingents of students from across Southern Mexico, parents and teachers. They marched from government office to government office in this city, the capital of the state of Guerrero.

The December 12 victims were student teachers protesting the conditions under which they are forced to study. They were gunned down by government security forces breaking up a protest blocking a highway that links the capital city with the tourist center of Acapulco and other cities.

The murdered protesters—Jorge Alexis Herrera Pino and Gabriel Echeverria—were students at a rural teaching college, or normal school, in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. Known in México as *normalistas*, students at these rural institutions all come from poor families and depend on government stipends for their meals and living accommodations.

The schools, which were formed in the 1920s and 1930s in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, have a reputation for being centers of political radicalism. Half of them were shut down in 1968, following the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968.

As part of the series of so-called educational reforms currently aimed at the privatization of education in México, rural normal schools are being starved of funds and many have been closed.

The students were demanding a meeting with Governor Aguirre, who had previously agreed to expand the number of students that could attend the school from 140 to 170, to raise student food subsidies and to guarantee 30 teaching posts annually to its graduates. Aguirre has yet to implement his agreement.

"Four hundred of us, students and members of community organizations, blocked the road to press for our demands because the governor only says yes, but refuses to sign the agreement," one student told the online journal *Contralínea.*

The Ayotzinapa School educates 500 *normalistas*, who study and live in the school for four years.

"A special squad from the Federal Police arrived to remove our barricade; we spoke to them; one of them then made a call; we do not know to whom. He then informed the others that they now had the 'green light' to do what they wanted."

In addition to the Federal Police officers involved, the operation also included squads from the ministerial and state police forces. It appears that after having been given the "green light," the federal officers broke off the dialogue and commenced firing tear gas, live ammunition and fragmentation grenades into the crowd of about 300 demonstrators. The shooting continued for about 30 minutes from all sides, including from plainclothes officers. The demonstrators sought shelter among six buses that the students had commandeered and were using to block the road.

In addition to the two dead demonstrators, seven were wounded. One of the wounded, Edgar David Espiritu, is in the hospital with serious injuries and in a coma. An employee at a nearby gas station was burned as a result of a fire connected with the ambush. Twenty-four were arrested, including a reporter. Many were beaten and at least one person was tortured and forced to "confess" to be in possession of an AK 47 assault weapon to use against the police.

Mexico City daily *La Jornada* reported that 15 protesters are missing and unaccounted for, in addition to those arrested.

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A Guerrero daily, also named *La Jornada*, detailed minute-by-minute account of the police assault on the demonstrations, which said that police began firing as soon as the protesters arrived at the scene, around noon, and continued to do so until 12:20 p.m., refusing to give aid to wounded students that approached them.

The *Jornada* reporter observed how the federal police first fired tear gas, then fired shots in the air. This was followed by shots fired directly at students by other security forces, and again by the federal forces.

This onrush by the police was well coordinated and directed from above, according to the Guerrero account, with the purpose of corralling the students against the buses that were barricading the road. Having dispersed or detained the protesters, the police spent the rest of the day going house to house to nab those students that had evaded arrest.

Arrested with the students was the Guerrero *Jornada* reporter, Raul Sendic Garcia Estrada, who was recognized as a journalist by agents of the ministerial police. His cell phone, camera and wallet were taken as he was roughed up. Upon his release the police confiscated his notes, including the names of those that had been arrested with him.

The students insist that they had no weapons, other than stones and Molotov cocktails that they did not have the opportunity to throw. Initially, state authorities claimed that bullets fired by non-students who had infiltrated the protest from the outside had killed Herrera and Echeverria. For his part, Governor Aguirre made the dubious claim that he has no knowledge of who killed the two *normalistas* and has called for the formation of a civilian truth commission to investigate. He also declared that his policy is not to send in armed police to break up demonstrations, and that he did not give the order to fire on the students.

General Ramón Arreola, state security undersecretary, has exposed this last allegation as false. “He told me to clean the road,” said Arreola, “and the road is clean.” Arreola has now been suspended, and 10 police officers have been arrested pending the results of an investigation into the incident.

Aguirre is infamous for his role in the 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre in which 17 unarmed protesting poor farmers were killed and 42 others where injured by Guerrero state police under orders from then Governor Ruben Figueroa. Popular revulsion over the killings forced Figueroa to step down. Aguirre was then named interim governor, charged with insuring that no investigation would ever take place.

Aguirre was elected governor this January and has held that office since April of this year as a member of the Dialogue for Mexican Reconstruction (DIA) alliance, formed by the bourgeois-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the petty bourgeois Party of Labor and the Convergence movement. He formally joined the PRD this September. PRD leader and presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has so far remained silent on the latest incident of state violence.

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