

# Relatives of disappeared students confront Mexico's president

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Family members of the disappeared Ayotzinapa student teachers (*normalistas*) met with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto on October 29, 33 days after the massacre that left three students (and three others) dead, several others wounded and 43 disappeared.

After the five-hour closed-door meeting, the relatives left with a sense of increased anger and disappointment, and with their longstanding distrust toward the government confirmed.

"It was a meeting of simple promises when we need things to happen; we need our comrades alive at the school," declared David Flores, a student leader from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal College.

The relatives confronted the president, demanding answers that were not given. "Why was it that after the army patrol found the wounded students that had been left behind by the attackers, they did nothing to take them to hospitals?" declared Nicolás Andrés Cuadro whose son's lower jaw was destroyed by a bullet and could have died from asphyxia. "Who ordered the execution style murder?" asked Marta Isela Echeverría, whose brother was one of the massacred students.

Seething anger was present in the accounts that some of the parents gave to the press.

Emiliano Navarrete recounted to the Mexico City daily *La Jornada*: "I told the president that I did not come to this meeting to ask a favor but to demand, as a Mexican, that he tell me why did bullets rain on our children. My son did not disappear; men in uniform kidnapped him. I demanded that he respond why was the mayor not questioned from day one? Why was he allowed to escape like a rat? Are you, mister president also going to flee like the rest?"

Navarrete and many of the relatives suspect that Federal authorities in Mexico City share responsibility

for the massacre and kidnapping with the governments of the city of Iguala and of the State of Guerrero.

Another parent, Felipe de la Cruz, said: "We told the president that we do not trust his government and that if he did not feel competent to produce results, that he should call in the Inter-American Human Rights Commission."

In a press conference, President Peña Nieto declared that he and the parents had "come to an understanding." The parents rejected that bland and pro-forma statement; they reported having had to pressure the president into putting his signature on what he had agreed to verbally.

This includes an intensified search for the students and giving rural providing schools with the dignity and funding that they deserve. The government also agreed that it would stop the practice of accusing rural *normalistas* of being connected to political guerrilla groups, thus making them "fair game" for repression by the Mexican State.

The meeting between the parents and the president failed to come up with a credible narrative of what happened the night of September 26. Rather than the truth, the Peña Nieto administration seems to be looking to construct a narrative that will quiet things in the street, circumscribe the consequences to a few suspects in Iguala, Cocula and Guerrero, and, above all limit the political fall-out for the ruling elites, beneficiaries themselves of the sale of cocaine, opium and heroin, methamphetamines and marihuana and engaged in a decades-long one-sided civil war on youth, workers and small farmers.

A report in the *El Proceso.com* web page about the search for bodies in the Cocula garbage dump, reads more like a Keystone Cops study in incompetence, with the reporters left wondering whether the government in

fact wants the students to be found.

Fifty-six “suspects” are now in custody. Each arrest is accompanied by the reports of new “confessions” and new leads. Yet nothing is found. This is not surprising given the police state methods used to catch these suspects and extract “confessions,” through arbitrary arrests, torture and beatings.

On Tuesday in Cocula, relatives of the missing *normalistas* rallied in protest charging that federal police officers had arrested and tortured them with no warrants.

The police also broke into other homes, supposedly looking for *Guerreros Unidos* gang members: “They broke the locks to my home, beat my brother and father, asking were we kept weapons and how many bodies we had buried,” said Guadalupe, daughter of one of the victims of the assault.

Irma Arrollo, whose son (a farmer) Gustavo was arrested on October 21, told *El Proceso*: “They allowed me to see my son for 15 minutes. He told me that he had been beaten. They put bags of water on his head. They hit him.” Pointing at her calf she added: “he was all scratched on this side like he had been dragged around. They told him he was guilty, that he was a *Guerreros Unidos* member. They accused him of things that were false.”

“For days they had come many, many, many times, carrying out sweeps in the fields, until they came up with ‘guilty’ people,” said Arrollo.

Attorney General Murillo assured the press on Monday that “all the power of the Mexican State” is now working on the investigation.

As more low-level alleged suspects are picked up from the fields of Cocula and Iguala, those more directly implicated in having ordered the massacre, José Luis Abarca (PRD, Party of the Democratic Revolution), the mayor of Iguala, and his police chief, Felipe Flores, are still at large.

This is not the first incident involving Abarca and the criminal syndicates. At the end of last May, he responded violently to a strike and protests by miners in Iguala against Grupo México-owned mines in Taxco. The protests were led by the *Unión Popular Emiliano Zapata* (UPEZ)

On May 29, Abarca told a group of UPEZ activists “stop f\*\*\*ing around with me. I have people that work for me that can take care of you.”

On the evening of May 30, protest leaders Arturo Hernandez, Angel Román, Rafael Bandera, and five others were abducted by an armed group, blindfolded and transported to be killed. At the scene were Abarca and Flores, who ordered the torture of the men and their execution. Four managed to flee. Three bodies were found and one person was never accounted for.

At the funeral of one of the victims, agricultural consultant and PRD leader Arturo Hernandez, it is reported that thousands of miners lined the streets with their helmets on and standing at attention.

Despite efforts and testimony by the surviving victims, neither Abarca nor Flores was ever brought to justice. Amnesty international called on the federal government (under Enrique Peña Nieto) to investigate, but were turned away.

Even the PRD showed total indifference, despite the fact that Hernandez had been a founding member of the PRD in Guerrero. Indifference also, was shown by the Obama administration in Washington, even though the case had been presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and was well known.



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