

# International probe exposes Mexican government in case of 43 missing students

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On Sunday September 6, a group of independent experts issued a report on the assault against teaching college students ( *normalistas* ) in Iguala, Mexico on the night of September 26, 2014 that resulted in the shooting deaths of six students and two football players, the wounding of 25 and the abduction and disappearance of 43 students.

The September 6 report is the product of a six-months-long investigation by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE), which brought together investigators from Spain, Chile, Guatemala and Colombia. The IGIE was commissioned by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The group said it found no evidence to support the government version of events. This official story was that once the 43 students were abducted by Iguala and Cocula police officers and handed over to members of the “Guerreros Unidos” drug gang, they were killed and their bodies burned beyond recognition in a pyre of wood and tires at a Cocula garbage dump. Their ashes were then supposedly dumped in sacks in the San Juan River that runs nearby.

In addition, the IGIE report unmasked government claims that the Guerreros Unidos had mistaken the students, who were unarmed and unable to defend themselves, for a rival drug gang.

A video released together with the report proves that police and government agencies, including the Mexican military, had been tracking the students from the moment they left their school in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero up until the moment of the police assault. The video was from the Guerrero State’s Command, Control, and Communications Center (C4), with links to the police, military and political authorities in Mexico City.

The students were being closely monitored all along their route. Their activities were being reported to

government authorities in Mexico City as the events were going on.

The C4 video confirms what has been suspected since December 2014, when the Mexico City journal *Proceso*, in collaboration with investigators for the University of California in Berkeley and on the basis of student testimony and cell-phone videos, reported the involvement of the federal police and military in the massacre. The federal police, it is now certain, were at the scene from the beginning of the first assault, at 9:40 pm. The military arrived during the second assault, at around 11:30 pm.

The IGIE has been denied government permission to take the testimony from soldiers of the 27th infantry battalion based in Iguala, who had responded to the September 26 massacre.

Military authorities have erected a wall of silence against any inquiries into their activities that night, including questions about the role of the 27th infantry in the abduction of the students. There have been several clashes and protest rallies at the military base by parents demanding answers.

The student teachers ( *normalistas* ) intended to rally in the Mexico City neighborhood of Tatlelolco, site of the massacre of hundreds of students in Mexico City that took place on October 2, 1968. The trip was part of their campaign to raise funds for their underfunded schools. For that purpose they had commandeered several buses.

The armed assault on September 2014 was not limited to the students. Also attacked were football (soccer) players who were returning from a game (two were killed) and scores of bystanders who were chased away. The military may have also been complicit on the attack on the football team.

The claim that the disappeared students’ bodies had

been burned was a central part of the government version of events made public last January by then Mexican Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam. IGIE forensic investigators concluded that the students' cremation was impossible because it would have required an enormous amount of lumber and fuel, which would have caused damage and left traces in the surrounding area.

In addition, the IGIE document charges the government with shoddiness in the way government investigators ignored DNA and other evidence collected from the buses, such as hair, clothing and other belongings, plus the presence of a fifth bus that seems to have disappeared (the government only acknowledged four).

During the presentation of the report, IGIE spokesperson Francisco Cox declared that "the time required to incinerate one body under those conditions is between 90 and 120 minutes"; calculating that to carbonize 43 bodies would have taken 60 hours and required 30,100 kilograms of wood and 13,330 kilograms of tires.

Jesús Murillo Karam also raised the possibility (supposedly on the basis of testimony from gang members) that the students had connections with the drug gangs. This was also categorically contradicted by the IGIE report.

In addition to the forensic investigations, the IGIE experts interviewed eyewitnesses, surviving students, and individuals under arrest. The report points out that the latter's testimony (upon which the government has based its case) is plagued with inconsistencies and tainted by the fact that some of the prisoners had been tortured.

Despite the IGIE report, the immediate reaction of the government of president Peña Nieto and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was to insist on the veracity of Murillo Karam's version of events. However, on Tuesday, the government seized on the issue of the fifth bus to indirectly criminalize the *normalistas*, suggesting that that vehicle may have been transporting drugs for Guerreros Unidos.

"The suggestion having to do with narcotics is a delicate subject because of what it may mean and represent," declared Roberto Campa, Peña Nieto's sub secretary of Human Rights. It was "social pressure" that had prevented the government from investigating

the narcotics connection, declared Campa.

In fact, as was pointed out in the *Proceso/UC Berkeley* investigation, the most likely motive for terror tactics used against the *normalistas* nearly a year ago is that the rural teaching colleges have long been considered centers of left-wing political activism that threatens the established order. As with Tatlelolco 47 years ago, this was a political crime, by a government that has lost all legitimacy with the Mexican working class and lower middle classes.

Campa made his declaration as he was receiving a petition from the relatives of hundreds of missing Mexicans for a national registry of all the disappeared and federal resources to find them and to help their families.

Cynically anticipating mass demonstrations and angry protests on the anniversary of the Iguala kidnappings and killings, the legislature is set to declare September 26 "National Day Against Forced Disappearances." Flags will be flown at half-mast. Not to be outdone, president Peña Nieto is proposing legislation that would "outlaw forced disappearances."

Felipe de la Cruz, spokesperson for the families of the 43 missing *normalistas*, has called on Mexicans not to celebrate Mexican Independence Day (September 15) in the same way as in past years. Interviewed by the Mexico City daily *La Jornada*, Cruz declared:

"There is nothing to celebrate; instead we appeal to Mexican society to remind us on that day that 43 are missing and demand that the guilty be punished." He added that "the tall tale that they insisted on has collapsed. Like it or not this is president Peña Nieto's responsibility... his cabinet is full of liars, and he is now looking for ways of avoiding his responsibility."



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