

36-year-old Salvadoran mother killed by Mexican police officer

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On Saturday, 36-year-old Victoria Esperanza Salazar Arriaza, a Salvadoran immigrant and mother of two, died a brutal and painful death at the hands of police in the Mexican tourist city of Tulum. Her murder was caught on a video which has gone viral on social media.

The horrific footage shows Salazar handcuffed and pinned facedown into the asphalt and screaming as a female police officer forces her knee into Salazar's back as three male officers stand around her. It is unclear how much time Salazar spent in this position. The video cuts to Salazar's limp body. She is still handcuffed, and the unaffected officers pick up and heave her limp body onto the bed of their police truck. No resuscitation or medical services whatsoever were attempted on Salazar by the officers.

Police detained Salazar after getting a call from a convenience store that she was acting aggressively and potentially under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It has since come to light that the store's owner, Manuel Barradas, barred her entry because he said she appeared "off."

Salazar's autopsy revealed she died from a rupture of her first and second vertebrae, according to a statement Monday from Oscar Montes de Oca of the Quintana Roo state prosecutor's office. No mention has been made that any substance was found in her system.

Salazar leaves behind two daughters, aged 15 and 16. They had initially moved to Mexico in 2018 on a humanitarian visa to escape the violence in El Salvador. Salazar supported them with work she had found as a housekeeper in a local hotel resort. Rosibel Arriaza, Salazar's mother told reporters, "She did not deserve to die like this. I feel indignation, I feel powerless, I feel frustrated. I would have wanted to be there as a mother."

Outrage has boiled over to the point that the four officers involved in Salazar's death have been fired and taken into custody. They are accused of using "disproportionate" force in committing femicide—a formal charge under Mexican law. A statement from the Quintana Roo state prosecutor's office declared that the "The law will be applied rigorously so this crime doesn't go unpunished."

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) responded to the killing, declaring that Salazar had been "brutally treated and murdered."

Her death at the hands of police, held face down on the ground with a knee in her back outside a convenience store is nearly identical to the brutal murder of George Floyd in the United States, who was killed by police May 5. The now-former officer who pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than 9 minutes, Derek Chauvin, is currently on trial for murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Each are among the hundreds killed by the police in the United States and in Mexico every year, however their deaths were clearly caught on video, sparking widespread outrage.

The killing of the young mother has sparked protests from Tulum to Mexico City and also in El Salvador. Hundreds have taken to the streets, hosting vigils and demanding justice. People held signs that read "The system killed Victoria" and chanted "paradise reeks of blood," in reference to the town's tourist industry.

The primary focus in the media and among protesters has been on the fact that she is a woman, but more significantly Salazar has been added to the growing list of immigrants in Mexico who face daily brutalization, theft, rape and murder as they seek a better life in the country or on their way north to the United States. Migrants are regularly targeted by both criminal gangs and Mexican police and government officials who often work in tandem with the gangs.

The nightmare of abuses continues into the US, where overcrowded detention centers hold children and adults, and tens of thousands are pushed back into Mexico within hours of arrival and denied a chance to apply for asylum under international law. The Biden administration has carried forward the attacks on asylum spearheaded by Obama and Trump.

The cynical campaign of AMLO for "hugs not bullets" has proven a slap in the face to the more than 30,000 who have been killed this past year alone. While the Mexican state attempts to pin all violence on the drug cartels, the police themselves are widely known for partaking in extrajudicial

killings, carrying out torture, abuse, and rape.

The last decade alone contained one of the most gruesome and horrific mass killings when 43 protesting students were killed in the town of Iguala in Guerrero State. All evidence pointed to a coordinated police and military attack on the buses of students, but unsurprisingly no official has been charged, revealing the impunity with which Mexican police forces regularly operate.

Earlier this month, a dozen police officers were arrested for the massacre in February of 19 people, primarily migrants in the border state of Tamaulipas. Their charred remains were found inside a burned pickup truck riddled with bullet holes 40 miles south of McAllen, Texas and the United States border. No bullet casings were found on the scene, pointing to a concerted coverup. Luís Alberto Rodríguez Juárez, spokesperson for the Tamaulipas state government said that video surveillance footage and discrepancies between police reports, “shaped the probability that at least 12 state police officers participated in this situation.”

Carlos, a supporter and student in Mexico told the WSWS, “The death of Victoria Esperanza Salazar as a result of police brutality in Tulum, Mexico is a tragic event showcasing the realities of class antagonisms in the nation. Once again, the class character of the police is clearly shown, they are the strong-arm of the bourgeois state, they are the enforcers of the norm.”

“There has been a widespread dissemination of this story under the label of femicide and under the flag of “pseudo-progressive” reactionary identity politics,” Carlos noted. “To label this tragic incident as a femicide is to mischaracterize the entire situation, the term femicide refers a ‘sex-based’ hate crime; it’s the intentional killing of a woman or a girl because they’re female. Victoria wasn’t killed because she’s a woman, she’s a victim of the societal conditions that expose the international working class to the apparatuses of repression of the bourgeois state.”

It is of no surprise that Salazar’s tragic killing has been added to the growing list of attacks on immigrants in Mexico. The fault lies not only with AMLO, but the Biden administration which is carrying forward the brutal anti-immigrant and imperialist policies of the prior Trump administration.

Most recently, some 2.7 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine were held out by Biden as an offering to Mexico City in exchange for promises that AMLO will increase his deployment of National Guard and Army troops to its southern border with Guatemala to halt the influx of Central American migrants.

Furthermore, AMLO’s denunciation of Salazar’s killing could not be emptier with his government overseeing the rise

of COVID-19 cases and deaths throughout the country.

On the same day Salazar was killed, the Mexican health ministry published a report which showed the real COVID-19 death toll is at least 60 percent higher than its current official count of 201,623 deaths. A count of excess deaths in the country between the period of December 20, 2019 and February 13, 2021 shows that the number of additional deaths is 417,002 and put the total much closer to the United States. The majority of the Mexican population has continued working throughout the pandemic and no government assistance has been offered to keep the population at home to stop the spread of COVID-19.

El Salvador’s President Nayib Bukele made similar empty statements, urging AMLO to apply the “full force of the law” and declaring that his country would care for Salazar’s daughters once repatriated to El Salvador.

Left out of the cynical indignation from Bukele and AMLO is the fact that Salazar and millions of other migrants have fled the poverty, destitution and gang violence which both of their governments oversee. Salazar and her family are from Sonsonate, El Salvador. In 2017, the city had a 43 percent poverty rate, higher than the average in the country. The country’s long and violent history was the product US-backed fascist regime.

The indifference of the ruling elite to lives of workers is international. The defense of immigrants and the defense of human life can only be carried out through an international struggle for socialism that unites the working class across all borders.



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