

Remains dumped in Guadalajara identified as those of missing Mexican call center workers

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The state prosecutor's office in the central west Mexican state of Jalisco on Tuesday said that forensic analysis had confirmed that the chopped up human bones and remains found in 45 trash bags in a ravine on the outskirts of the Guadalajara high tech suburb of Zapopan on May 29 were those of eight call center workers who were missing since May 20-22.

The Guadalajara metropolitan area is the third most populated in Mexico, with over five million people. It is also the home base of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), an outfit that rivals the Sinaloa Cartel as Mexico's largest.

CJNG engages in the traditional businesses of drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping. It is also notorious for its violence. CJNG is famous for its ruthless treatment of those who attempt to leave it or its employ, informants and turncoats.

The missing workers, who were aged from 23 to 37, worked out of two Zapopan call centers run by CJNG. Authorities believe they were murdered because they tried to leave their jobs.

Call centers are a major source of employment in Mexico for young people or migrants who may have learned English in the United States, but who have returned to Mexico. One of the Zapopan call center workers was from Arizona.

The call centers that employed the murdered workers likely were a scam designed to defraud money out of mostly elderly Americans and Canadians trying to sell or rent timeshares they had acquired in Mexico resort locations.

The timeshare fraud came to light in April, when the US Treasury Department announced sanctions against members or associates of CJNG, who apparently ran a similar operation in the Pacific coast Puerto Vallarta resort area, also located in Jalisco state.

In an April 2023 alert, the FBI said sellers were contacted via email by scammers who said they had a buyer lined up, but that the seller needed to pay taxes or other fees before the deal could go through.

The fraud was sophisticated. Victims were sent fake contracts and official-looking documents from the Mexican tax authority saying taxes were due on the prospective sale. Once this money was paid by the victims, the deals evaporated.

The FBI's report said that in 2022, the agency's Internet Crime Complaint Center "received over 600 complaints with losses of approximately \$39.6 million from victims contacted by scammers regarding timeshares owned in Mexico."

Jalisco is the state with the highest number of disappearances and missing persons in Mexico. An activist group for families of the disappeared, "Por Amor a Ellxs" —roughly, "For Love of Them"— said there are around 15,000 missing people in Jalisco, out of a total of about 112,000 nationwide.

Official figures show that more than 1,500 bodies have been found in Jalisco state since 2018. According to the office of Jalisco's special prosecutor for missing persons, 291 bodies were discovered in 2019, 544 in 2020, 280 in 2021, and 301 the following year. So far in 2023, 147 bodies have been found.

Mexican officials, up to the presidential level, and from all the major political parties, have a decades-long history of selectively collaborating with the narco cartels, including Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and likely Enrique Peña Nieto, the predecessor of current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), as well as Peña Nieto's predecessor Felipe Calderón.

AMLO exonerated former defense minister General Salvador Cienfuegos, who had been detained in the US for facilitating cartel drug shipments and brought him

home unscathed and uncharged.

AMLO has acted sympathetically toward the family of the Sinaloa Cartel's imprisoned head Chapo Guzman, publicly greeting his mother and one of his sons. Prominent members in government positions in AMLO's party MORENA are also strongly suspected of cartel ties.

AMLO, a darling of the pseudo-left, while increasingly militarizing the country, has done nothing substantial to rein in the cartels. And despite all his populist demagoguery, he has done little to alleviate Mexico's mass poverty or the conditions that drive young people into cartel activity and lead to many of their deaths.



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