

Mexico in a State of Crisis

The following reflection is a brief commentary by Sister Arlene Woelfel about the gravity of the situation in Mexico. Sister Arlene accompanies families of the disappeared and victims of torture at the Human Rights Center Paso del Norte in Juárez, Mexico.

For the past several months the eyes of the world have been fixed on Mexico. The arrest and disappearance in September of 2014 of 43 students from Ayotzinapa in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, represents the tip of the iceberg of the current crisis experienced by civil society and the political system of Mexico (extrajudicial executions, torture, forced disappearances, corruption, and collaboration between organized crime, politicians, military and police forces throughout the country.) What separates this case from other atrocities committed over the past several years is that the collusion between local government officials, police forces, and organized crime is now visible to everyone.

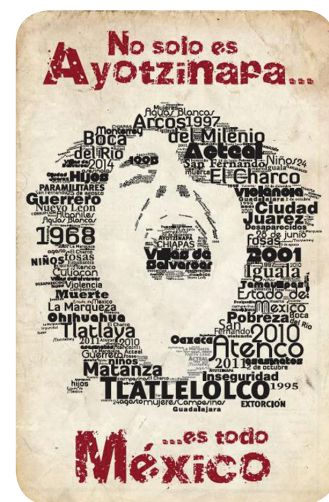
The National Register of Information about Lost or Disappeared Persons (Mexico) revealed that 5,098 people disappeared between January and the end of October, 2014. The daily average for disappearances in 2014 is 17 persons per day, the highest rate on record. The National Register cites a total number of 23,605 disappeared persons since 2007. Of that total, 28.7% are women. The greatest number of disappeared are between 15-19 years of age, followed by victims between the ages of 20-24 and children under 5 years of age.

The seriousness of the crime in Guerrero was initially ignored by the Mexican President Peña Nieto until the international community of journalists and solidarity actions worldwide pressured the Mexican government to take action. Amnesty International stated, “A lack of clear political leadership and real political will by successive governments has allowed officials and institutions to ignore their responsibilities to take decisive action whenever allegations of torture, forced disappearances, and other ill-treatment come to light.” (“Amnesty International Report: AMR 41/020/2014 September 2014. “Out of Control, Torture and Other Ill-Treatment in Mexico.”)



A protest banner representing the disappeared students used at prayer service in Juárez, Mexico states: “You have taken so many from us, that you have taken away our fear!”

the awakening of the civil society, that never before in these last several years, has protested against the corruption, the impunity, and the complicity of some authorities. ...We believe it is also necessary to move from protests to proposals.”



“It’s not only Ayotzinapa... All Mexico cries for justice!”

In spite of the search efforts for the 43 students, the government of Mexico has been slow to develop a protocol for the search of missing or disappeared persons. The families of the Ayotzinapa 43 insist that the Mexican government be truthful and assertive in the search for the missing students. Their cry has been reinforced by the people of Mexico who are so angry about the lack of respect for basic human rights that they have lost their fear of speaking out and taking action.

In light of the crime in Guerrero, the Bishops of Mexico issued a public statement in November 2014: “Enough Already!” “No more bloodshed. No more deaths. No more disappeared. No more pain nor shame. ...We view with hope



The diocese of Juárez, Mexico held a vigil of 43 hours to pray for the 43 students of Ayotzinapa and their families. They also remembered the more than 22,000 persons who have disappeared since 2007. The School Sisters of St. Francis helped coordinate the prayer service for their parish, Jesús Obrero.

The people of Mexico are no longer silent! The challenge will be to purge the current political system criminal elements and create realistic alternatives – a herculean task.

Update on the Ayotzinapa case:

Six months of failure and frustration has been the experience of the families of the missing students of Ayotzinapa, as they continued searching for their missing loved ones. On May 5 of 2015 the Federal Police of Mexico and the families of the 43 disappeared students came to an agreement to reestablish the search for the students who disappeared on September 26th of 2014. Both groups agreed to “continue the search process until there was certainty about the destiny of the disappeared students.” The agreement was facilitated by GIEI, a interdisciplinary group of independent experts named by the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights. (CIDH)

CIDH assumed this mission at the request of the Mexican government and the parents of the missing students. The appointed interdisciplinary group began work in March of 2015 and hopes to present its conclusions at the end of August 2015, almost one year after the brutal crime was committed.