

Protests across Mexico over disappearance of students

By Rafael Azul
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Protests marches and rallies continued throughout Mexico on Tuesday and Wednesday over the abduction and disappearance of 43 student teachers (*normalistas*) in the southern state of Guerrero last month. Young people, teachers and other workers took to the streets of many cities.

In addition to the disappearance of the 43, 6 people were killed and 19 wounded in a savage assault on the students on September 26 in the town of Iguala.

In the Guerrero capital of Chilpancingo, scene of violent street fighting on Monday that resulted in a fire at the State government house and the City Hall buildings, hundreds marched in silence.

Also in Chilpancingo, Guerrero teachers took over a highway toll plaza on the road that leads to the resort city of Acapulco (on Guerrero's pacific coast), collecting funds for the *normalistas* and the protest movement. The teachers' union indicated that as of Wednesday, 87 percent of Guerrero schools were on strike.

Two-thousand students marched in Morelia, Michoacán, in solidarity with the Ayotzinapa students and to mark the attack by federal security forces on the rural teaching college in Tiripeto, Michoacan, two years ago. Michoacan borders with Guerrero.

In Mexico City, student protests continue. On Tuesday, students rallied at the Autonomous Institute of Technology (ITAM). They lit candles and demanded that the students be released unharmed. "They took them alive and alive we want them back!" chanted the demonstrators. The ITAM rally was part of a 48-hour strike by university students and educators across México.

"We refuse to live in a nation that disappears and murders its students, whatever institution they attend, their social status, organization that they belong to or

ideas that they uphold," said in part a declaration made public by the protesters.

In Tijuana, Baja California, along the US border, hundreds of students marched from their campus to the border with the US, carrying banners and writing on fences and walls.

In Chihuahua, students at the teachers' school in the city of Parra rallied and distributed leaflets that said: "We are *normalistas*, not *terroristas*."

At last count, 29 universities had joined the protest walkout. On Wednesday, thousands of students rallied at the iconic library of the internationally prestigious National Autonomous University, in Mexico City, including a delegation from the Ayotzinapa rural teaching college, comrades of the kidnapped students.

The demand that the 43 disappeared students be produced alive now transcends Mexico's borders. Students in Spain, Bolivia, China, the Netherlands, Bangladesh, Greece, Ireland, France, Bosnia, Thailand, Ethiopia and the United Kingdom have signed petitions and joined protests in support of the *normalistas*.

As part of this international campaign, **#43ConVidaYa**, calling for support for the demand that the *normalistas* be returned alive several *normalistas* produced this video asking for a general response to the attacks on students.

Twenty days after they were kidnapped from the city of Iguala (140,000 people, 125 miles south of Mexico City), nothing is known about the fate of the disappeared students.

While the Mexican government announced on Tuesday that the 28 burned and mutilated bodies found in a shallow grave in Iguala were not the missing teaching students (*normalistas*), forensic experts indicate that the DNA is often destroyed in the burning of bodies.

“If a bone is cremated at more than 300 degrees [Celsius] it’s almost impossible to identify because the collagen is burnt. That is why criminal organizations have adopted that technique,” declared Jorge Talavera, an expert from Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History.

Authorities are still investigating four other unmarked graves. Residents of the hills that surround Iguala have reported that more than 500 such graves exist in those hills, which are locally known as the clandestine cemetery of the Guerreros Unidos crime organization. It was local residents who first informed officials of the new graves.

Following the protests of Monday and Tuesday, and as educators and students were meeting to plan a national strategy of action, Guerrero officials announced that 14 police officers from the nearby town of Cocula had been arrested and confessed to having received the kidnapped students from the Iguala police and handed them over to the Guerreros Unidos gang.

Allegedly, the Cocula police officers falsified records to cover up the fact that they had been go-betweens of the drug gang and the Iguala police. The Guerreros Unidos gang is alleged to be a minor drug syndicate engaged in extortion and petty crime in addition to the trade in heroin and marijuana. Their motive for being involved in the disappearances of the students and their murder (if in fact they have been killed) has never been made clear.

Benjamin Mondragon, an alleged leader of Guerreros Unidos involved in the Guerrero kidnappings, reportedly committed suicide on Tuesday as he was about to be captured by federal forces in the town of Jiutepec, in the state of Morelos.

Testifying before a commission of legislators investigating the massacre and kidnapping, Guerrero state officials admitted that they found out about the event as it was happening. Nothing was done to stop the police assault, according to one official, because Iguala’s mayor, José Luis Abarca, did not answer the phone. The official declared that state police were not sent to the scene because of a protocol of collaboration with Iguala City Hall. State prosecutor Inaki Blanco could not explain how it was that Mayor Abarca was able to flee the next day.

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