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Mexico's crime wave has left about 25,000 missing, government documents show

By **William Booth**, Published: November 29

MEXICO CITY — Mexico's attorney general has compiled a list showing that more than 25,000 adults and children have gone missing in Mexico in the past six years, according to unpublished government documents.

The data sets, submitted by state prosecutors and vetted by the federal government but never released to the public, chronicle the disappearance of tens of thousands of people in the chaos and violence that have enveloped Mexico during its fight against drug mafias and crime gangs.

Families have been left wondering whether their loved ones are alive or among the more than 100,000 victims of homicides recorded during the presidency of Felipe Calderon, who leaves office Saturday.

The names on the list — many more than in previous, nongovernment estimates — are recorded in Microsoft Excel columns, along with the dates they disappeared, their ages, the clothes they were wearing, their jobs and a few brief, often chilling, details:

“His wife went to buy medicine and disappeared,” reads one typical entry.

“The son was addicted to drugs.”

“Her daughter was forced into a car.”

“The father was arrested by men wearing uniforms and never seen again.”

The documents were provided by government bureaucrats frustrated by what they describe as a lack of official transparency and the failure of government agencies to investigate the cases.

The leaked list is not complete — or, probably, precise. Some of the missing may have returned to their homes, and some families may never have reported disappearances.

But the list offers a rare glimpse of the running tally the Mexican government has been keeping, and it confirms what human rights activists and families of the missing have been

saying: that Mexico has seen an explosion in the number of such cases and that the government appears overwhelmed.

“What does the government do? Nothing or almost nothing. Why? There is a paralysis,” said Juan Lopez Villanueva of the group United Forces for Our Missing in Mexico. “The state has failed us.”

According to the National Commission on Human Rights, more than 7,000 people killed in Mexico in the past six years lie unidentified in morgue freezers or common graves.

The commission’s numbers suggest the government count might be accurate. From 2006 to mid-2011, the commission reports that more than 18,000 Mexicans were reported missing.

Calderon’s spokesman declined to offer a reason why the numbers have not been made public during his tenure, and the attorney general’s office did not respond to questions about the list that its staff members compiled.

Critics say the outgoing government has been slow to collect data on those who disappeared and is burying the numbers because their publication would highlight Mexico’s failure to investigate the cases and undermine efforts by Calderon to show that his U.S.-backed fight against organized crime is working.

“Releasing the data would add to the already deteriorating forecast about growing insecurity, and publishing such a very large number, 25,000, it just reinforces the idea that the country is violent,” said Edna Jaime Trevino, director of the think tank Mexico Evalua.

Whatever the reasons, the task of tracking the missing now falls to incoming president Enrique Pena Nieto’s new government. There is no statute of limitations for missing-person cases, and Mexico has heard withering criticism from both the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the United Nations about its handling of them.

In December 2011, Calderon pledged in a speech to create a national database including lists of the people who had disappeared and of unidentified bodies, and he promised it would be ready in early 2012.

Then in March, the Mexican Congress passed a law that required the government to establish Calderon’s database, which medical examiners, law enforcement officials and families could use to help track cases. Since then, lawmakers have failed to publish the regulations that would allow the law to be implemented.

State prosecutors agreed to provide data from their missing-person cases to the attorney general, but their reports appear uneven. For example, prosecutors in the northern border states of Chihuahua and Coahuila report only a few hundred cases, even as the governors of those states have stated that there were many more.

The list is a first step, but it is also a disappointment, according to Mexican officials and rights activists. That is because the list, as it is compiled, contains a broad spectrum of cases, mixing together all those who have vanished, whether they were forcibly abducted, young lovers running away or simply people who left their homes to work in the United States or elsewhere.

“This half-baked effort is reflective of an administration that never took the problem of disappearances seriously and is now trying to cover its tracks. But for all its problems, the list provides clear evidence that thousands of Mexicans have gone missing and that the government knew about them,” said Nik Steinberg, a researcher for Human Rights Watch.

According to his family, Antonio Verastegui, a shopkeeper, and his nephew, an engineering student, were detained by hooded men wearing police bulletproof vests on Jan. 24, 2009, when they were traveling from a religious festival to their home in the state of Durango.

“A police commander told us they had made a mistake in detaining them,” said Jorge Verastegui, a brother. “He told us they were arrested and beaten and released.”

The two have not been found.

“If the government releases the figures of the displaced, the missing and the dead, it would reflect badly on them, but they ignored us, they ignored the reality,” Verastegui said. “Because to release these figures would show that their strategies had failed, and they had failed us.”

Gabriela Martinez contributed to this report.

William Booth, “Mexico’s crime wave has left about 25,000 missing, government documents show”, *The Washington Post*, noviembre 29 de 2012, URL: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexicos-crime-wave-has-left-up-to-25000-missing-government-documents-show/2012/11/29/7ca4ee44-3a6a-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680_story_1.html, consultado el 1° de diciembre de 2012.

Revela *The Washington Post* lista de PGR con 25 mil desaparecidos en el sexenio

El compilado, incompleto, contiene datos de los estados nunca publicados, indica el diario

Afirma Human Rights que el documento prueba que el gobierno de Calderón conocía el tema

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La Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) compiló una lista con más de 25 mil adultos y menores de edad desaparecidos a lo largo del sexenio de Felipe Calderón, según documentos aún no publicados, reportó *The Washington Post*.

Los datos que integran la lista fueron entregados por procuradores estatales y revisados por el gobierno federal, pero nunca fueron difundidos públicamente; el total de desaparecidos es muy superior a cifras oficiales previas. El rotativo estadounidense informó que los nombres están registrados en columnas en formato Excel de Microsoft, e incluyen las fechas en que desaparecieron, sus edades, cómo vestían, sus empleos y algunos detalles breves a veces escalofriantes sobre su desaparición.

Un ejemplo repetitivo según el *Post*: Su esposa fue a comprar medicina y desapareció. Otros: Su hija fue forzada a entrar a un automóvil o El padre fue arrestado por hombres con uniformes y jamás fue visto más.

El diario reveló que estos documentos fueron entregados por burócratas frustrados por lo que describen como una falta de transparencia oficial y el fracaso de agencias gubernamentales en investigar estos casos.

The Washington Post señaló que esta lista filtrada no está completa ni necesariamente es precisa, ya que no se saben todos los detalles de las desapariciones, ni cuántas no han sido reportadas. Pero ofrece una cuenta constante que ha mantenido el gobierno, confirma lo que activistas de derechos humanos y familias de los desaparecidos han estado diciendo: que México ha visto una explosión en el número de este tipo de casos y que el gobierno parece estar abrumado, reportó el corresponsal del *Post* en México, William Booth.

Silencio oficial

El rotativo informó que el vocero de Felipe Calderón declinó ofrecer una razón por la cual estos números no han sido hechos públicos durante su gestión, mientras que la oficina de la PGR no respondió a preguntas sobre la lista que su personal ha compilado.

El *Post* señaló que algunos críticos en México consideran que estas cifras se han mantenido secretas porque resaltaría el fracaso del Estado en investigar los casos y minaría los esfuerzos de Calderón en demostrar que su lucha respaldada por Estados Unidos contra el crimen organizado está funcionando.

El periódico estadounidense recordó que en diciembre de 2011 Calderón se comprometió públicamente a crear un banco de datos nacional, que incluiría a los desaparecidos y que éste existiría a principios de 2012. En marzo, el Congreso aprobó una ley para establecer el banco de datos, pero desde entonces los legisladores no han logrado publicar las regulaciones para implementar la nueva ley.

Problema ignorado

También resaltó que la lista, con base en informes de autoridades estatales entregados a la PGR, incluye una amplia gama de personas que han desaparecido, sea por secuestros, amantes que se fugaron o de individuos que se fueron a buscar trabajo del otro lado de la frontera.

Nik Steinberg, de Human Rights Watch, comenta al *Post* que esa lista tan mal compilada refleja un gobierno que nunca tomó seriamente el problema de los desaparecidos y que ahora intenta cubrir sus huellas. A pesar de sus problemas, el documento ofrece pruebas claras de que miles de mexicanos están desaparecidos y que el gobierno sabía de ello.

S/a, “Revela The Washington Post lista de PGR con 25 mil desaparecidos en el sexenio”,
La Jornada, 1° de diciembre de 2012, URL:
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/12/01/politica/017n1pol> , consultado el 1° de
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