



International Fact-Finding Mission: Violence Against Women in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala

A ten-day fact-finding mission to Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala found that violence against women has reached crisis proportions in those countries.

From January 21 to January 31, a women's delegation of human rights activists, journalists and foreign policy experts, led by Nobel Peace Prize winners Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Just Associates (JASS), traveled to the region and heard more than two hundred testimonies from women survivors and grassroots organizers, journalists and human rights advocates, as well as meeting with Presidents Porfirio Lobo and Otto Perez Molina, Mexican Attorney General Marisela Morales and other high-level officials.

The delegation documented numerous cases of femicides, disappearances, rapes, attacks on women human rights defenders, violations of women's human rights and persecution in all three countries. Women testified that the attacks come from organized crime and from the government security forces charged with fighting crime and protecting citizens.

One of the most disturbing findings was that the governments, while formally recognizing the problem, are doing little in practice to abate the violence, particularly in cases that involve government forces. In some cases, governments are directly implicated in the violence. The mounting crimes of extreme violence and targeted repression against women remain largely uninvestigated, unsolved and unpunished, due to fragile state institutions, deep flaws in the political and justice systems of these countries and a lack of political will to reform policies and institutions that implicitly condone them.

Increasing militarization and police repression under the guise of the war on drugs has led to more violence overall and more frequent attacks on women, who lead efforts to protect their communities against threats to their lands and natural resources, and protest military and police abuses. Repeatedly during the fact-finding mission, women in the three countries called on the U.S. government to cease funding abusive security forces, and channel aid to social programs that strengthen basic human rights and democracy.

An alarming rise in *femicides*—while military spending increases:

- On average, one woman is murdered every day in Honduras. Honduras now has the highest per capita homicide rate in the world. Femicides rose 257% between 2002 and 2010. During the same period, US military and police aid almost doubled to Honduras and, more recently, US military and police aid tripled.
- During the coup regime, beginning in June 2009 and the post-coup regime led by Porfirio Lobo, there has been a spike in femicides, often with the complicity or involvement of government officials and state security forces. Shortly after the killing of civilians during a DEA-sponsored drug raid in Honduras last month—in which two pregnant women were killed—President Porfirio Lobo called for more military aid to Honduras.

- In Mexico, femicides have gone up 40% since 2006, in the context of the war on drugs, which has left more than 50,000 dead, 250,000 displaced and at thousands forcibly disappeared. US military and police aid to Mexico was over US 500 million dollars in 2010, as compared to US 20 million dollars in 2000—this represents a 2400% increase.
- The Mexican border state of Chihuahua has a female murder rate of 34.73 per 100,000—15 times higher than the world rate. Femicides in Chihuahua (where systematic femicide was detected in Ciudad Juarez back in 1993) increased 1,000 percent between 2007 and 2010—the period when Operation Chihuahua, a drug war offensive supported by the U.S. government, was launched.
- 685 women were assassinated in Guatemala in 2010, compared to 213 in 2000. US military and police aid to Guatemala in 2010 is three times higher than it was in 2000.

A Lack of Justice:

- More than 95% of crimes are never punished in the three countries visited. Most are never even investigated by authorities. Courts routinely discriminate against women and frequently harass women who bring charges or petitions for justice. The lack of access to justice for indigenous and Africa descendent women is dramatic.
- The use of trumped-up criminal charges against activists has become a common tactic to scare human rights activists and into halting their activities.
- 200,000 people were murdered and 100,000 women raped during the Guatemalan genocide in the 1980s; hundreds of members of the political opposition were assassinated or disappeared during the Mexican dirty war of the same period; and hundreds of people have been murdered during and after the Honduran coup in 2009. Very few of these cases have even gone to trial.

Women Human Rights Defenders Under Attack

- In 2010 and 2011, 24 women human rights defenders were assassinated in the region (14 in Mexico, 2 in Guatemala and 8 in Honduras).
- Women human rights defenders are frequently subjected to illegal arrests, persecution, cruel and inhumane mistreatment, rape, robbery, intimidations, murder, threats against them and their families, and home invasion.
- Every day, on average, there is at least one attack on human rights defenders in Guatemala. Eighty-three percent of the attacks are directed at activists working to protect their lands and natural resources.

For More Information:

Rachel Vincent, Nobel Women's Initiative
rvincent@nobelwomensinitiative.org
 613-569-8400, ext. 113

Lisa VeneKlasen, Just Associates (JASS)
Lisa.veneklasen@justassociates.org
 202-232-1211