

MEXICO - Activists Lash Out at Government Report on the Dead Women of Ciudad Juárez (Diego Cevallos, IPS)

Sunday 19 February 2006, posted by [Manuela Garza Ascencio](#)

- [IPS](#) - Activists in Mexico are upset over a report by a special prosecutor's office on the killings of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez, which they say buries many of the key facts and arguments relating to the murders.

"The report is humiliating and disgraceful, because it falsifies and plays down the facts," Esther Chávez, president of Casa Amiga, a non-governmental organisation that provides support to the victims' families, told IPS.

Ciudad Juárez, a city of 1.3 million people which borders El Paso, Texas, has been shaken by the hundreds of murders and disappearances of women which have occurred there since 1993.

According to human rights groups, a large number of the victims had been raped - some by multiple attackers - and tortured. Theories about the motives for these crimes range from satanic rituals to pornography rings and "snuff" films in which someone is actually murdered. Human organ trafficking is also suspected.

But according to an extensive report by the Special Prosecutor's Office investigating the Ciudad Juárez killings, which was released on Thursday, "the exact dimensions of the problem have been distorted," thus creating myths and unfounded rumours.

"If it was such a minor problem, why didn't they say so before? Why have they spent so much money investigating it? I think the government wants to downplay the situation, but even if only one more woman is killed, we will continue to cry out," Chávez said in a telephone interview from Ciudad Juárez.

Marimar Monroy, of the non-governmental Mexican Commission for Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, said the Special Prosecutor's Office report appears to promote the message "that violence against women, and 'femicide', aren't important matters."

"This problem is not about numbers, it's about a climate of violence that is persistent and unacceptable," Monroy told IPS.

The prosecutors' inquiry concluded that there was no pattern of serial killing among the 379 murders of women in Ciudad Juárez registered in the last 11 years, and that sexual violence was involved in only 78 of the killings.

Furthermore, it stated, 125 of the women died in their own homes at the hands of relatives, friends or acquaintances, and most of the murdered women lived in a highly "criminal and violent" environment.

The Special Prosecutor's Office, which comes under the Attorney-General's Office, reported that the largest number of killings of women in Mexico occurred in Toluca, near the capital.

According to statistics on the number of homicides per 100,000 population, the next in rank is Tecate, in the northern state of Baja California, followed by the resort city of Acapulco on the Pacific coast. Ciudad Juárez ranks fourth.

And with respect to missing women in Ciudad Juárez, activists put the number at more than 4,000, but the official inquiry mentions only 47 documented cases.

The report admits that the local authorities in charge of investigating the murders in Ciudad Juárez had been markedly negligent in the past, which had aggravated the climate of violence against women.

The facts and conclusions of the report are dubious, because discredited sources of information were used and important facts have been ignored, said Chávez, one of the most active voices in Mexico to denounce the violence against women in Ciudad Juárez.

In recent years the Mexican government has come under heavy pressure from local and international human rights groups for the spate of killings of women in Ciudad Juárez.

In response to the pressure, President Fox named a Special Prosecutor's Office and a special commission for the Juárez cases. And now, on Friday, he replaced the Juárez special prosecution by a new body called the Special Prosecutor's Office Investigating Crimes Related to Violence against Women in the Country.

But the working methods of these bodies, and the reports they produce, have been seriously questioned by activists.

Esther Chávez commented that the latest report on the Ciudad Juárez killings was "hurtful," because "basically it's making a comparison between the situation in Juárez and other places, which is no consolation and does nothing to alter the fact that most of the crimes remain unpunished."

Most of the murdered women were in the 15-30 age group, and many were from low-income social strata and worked in maquiladora factories, which operate in tax-free zones and assemble products for export using imported materials.

These factories are concentrated in Ciudad Juárez and other Mexican cities along the U.S. border. Their work force mainly consists of young women, many of whom are living far away from their families.

In Ciudad Juárez, a number of factors — migration, unemployment, social exclusion, a large floating population, human trafficking and drug trafficking, among others — converge to give the city its particular characteristics. Together with the social dynamic generated by the large number of national and foreign maquiladoras, they have brought levels of extreme violence to the city, according to government reports.

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