

# Disappeared Students in Mexico: Global Struggle for Ayotzinapa Captures World's Attention

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More than 200 actions were carried out Thursday, coinciding with Mexico's Day of Revolution.

A student's skin was peeled over his head in a gruesome and clear display of a narco-state murder. The photo of the murder, which took place in the drug war-torn state of Guerrero some seven weeks ago, quickly went viral on the Internet. On the same day, five other people were killed and some 43 more students went "missing" in the small town of Ayotzinapa. In a press conference addressing the abuses more than one month after the disappearance of the students, who hailed from a rural-based and selective teachers college in Guerrero, an Attorney General presumed them "dead" without presenting any evidence to substantiate his conclusion. The nation's leading prosecutor said he was "tired" by the end of the press conference, much to the chagrin of those who sympathized with the plight of the parents of the disappeared students.

Those [happenings have served](#) as the sparks that have ignited the nation's ire to a feverish boiling point in one of the largest countries and economies of Latin America. Mexico has witnessed near daily and nation-wide actions of resistance. Since the disappearance of the "*normalistas*" (students training to be teachers) on September 26, the country has been brimming with mass marches, candle-light vigils, university-campus and labor-union-led strikes, occupations of official and university buildings, riot police-led arrests of demonstrators, property destruction of official buildings, sit-ins, panels ruminating over the ills of narco-state violence and international bridge closings.

While the 43 students, who are technically still missing due to the lack of any corpses being forensically tied to the students, were what clearly catalyzed the movement's inception, much of the country has long been weary of the systematic problem of disappearances and the eery official impunity which has often surrounded them. Nothing less than some 24,000 disappearances, over the course of the last three years alone, account for official estimates. Other analysts estimate the actual total as being far higher than that.

The Mayor of Iguala and his wife, dubbed as the "imperial couple," were arrested several weeks ago, as teleSUR [previously reported](#). At the time of their arrest, speculation was that their detention may produce valuable clues that could help solve the case of the disappeared students. However, no significant advances have been made in the case since the detention of the couple. At the time of their arrest, the on-the-run couple were fugitives from the law and in hiding when authorities busted them at a rented home in Itzapalapa, Mexico City.

Some 200 planned actions of resistance were carried out to coincide with the Day of

Revolution, an important historical marker for Mexico; a national holiday usually marked by official parades and patriotism. November 20, 1910 is the day which Francisco Madero called for revolution against Mexico's then ruling dictator, Porfirio Diaz. After a decade-long struggle, the revolution wound up being successful and November 20 has been commemorated in Mexico ever since.

The mass resistance movement seeking justice for the 43 Ayotzinapa students has a moniker fitting for the digital age: #YaMeCanse, a Twitter hash-tag. The hash-tag sprung up nearly instantly on countless Twitter feeds in response to Attorney General Jesus Murillo Karam's complaints of fatigue during the now infamous press conference two weeks ago, as a sarcastic, double-meaning battle-cry of resistance for the movement. The movement's resistance reached its highest peak to-date Thursday, November 20 and put on ample display across the country and the world.

After Thursday's nation-wide and international resistance day crescendoed, analysts and commentators across the Mexican news media spectrum began speaking of a modern day revolution now brewing in the country.

### **Actions Held All Across Mexico and Beyond**

Thursday's resistance was dubbed a "Global Struggle for Ayotzinapa," as nation-wide protests paralleled solidarity movement actions across the globe, including actions taken as far away in European countries such as Spain and Holland, and in several of the largest states of the U.S., in Texas and California.

Events organized in Mexico City, the capital of the country, seat of the federal government and home to no less than a fourth of the country's total population, led the global actions.

Three Mexico City-bound caravans led by family members of the disappeared "normalistas" called the world's attention. When the caravans arrived to capital district, they spawned three corresponding marches which emanated from some of the city's most important places: the Angel of Independence, which is surrounded by a spate of buildings bearing the offices and logos of multi-national companies; Tlatelolco, the site of the infamous 1968 massacre of hundreds of students; and the Monument to the Revolution, an important marker hailing back to 1910.

All three marches eventually converged, creating a massive presence in the city's historic downtown square, which is called the Zócalo. Therein, creative actions and scenes took place which generated some of the most widespread images that went viral across the Internet.

A dummy depicting President Enrique Peña Nieto was lit on fire in effigy of the President. The crowd, now completely converged from the three marches and caravans, made a massive circle around the symbolic burning. Thereafter, skirmishes between young masked protesters and police occurred, as fires were lit in front of the door to the National Palace.

Official figures have not yet been released, but arrests were reportedly made.

Meanwhile, actions across the country manifested in every major city in Mexico. The movement urged all Mexicans to refrain from working and attending school in an effort to stage a national strike.

The border cities of Ciudad Juarez and El Paso sported a rare display of simultaneous cross-border resistance in holding events, marches and political actions. The two cities combine to form the largest border metropolis of the world, where international bridge crossings were temporarily blocked by protesters. After the block was lifted by demonstrators, they successfully demanded the free passage of hundreds of passenger vehicles, who usually have to pay 26 pesos (about two dollars) to cross the bridge. Thousands more protested the official Juarez parade, while in El Paso, student groups and solidarity organizations converged in front of the Mexican consulate in protest of the disappearance of the 43 students.

Hermosillo in the northern state of Sonora had a march with thousands of protesters, organized by local labor unions and students. In dramatic fashion, students proceeded [to occupy and take control](#) of state congressional chambers. The occupation was planned as an act of solidarity with the disappeared “normalista” students and demanded the ending of impunity and narco-state violence.

In Tijuana, Mexico’s second largest border metropolis, a contingent consisting of high schools and the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC) held a Revolutionary March, as an alternative to the official parade of the city. Protest leaders called for an end to state-repression.

Cuernavaca is the city where Mexico’s most famous poet, Javier Sicilia, hails. Sicilia has not written a poem since the 2011 murder of his son and six of his friends in a presumed case of drug cartel violence, but he did lead Mexico’s most extensive peace and anti-drug war movement. The peace movement erupted and held national caravans shortly after the peak of drug war-violence of the previous Calderon administration. Thursday, a number of labor unions led a march which ended in the Cortes Palace. A mass assembly took place after the march, where organizing for future actions was carried out.

The capital city of Oaxaca had a major uprising in 2006, which similar to the #YaMeCanse movement of today, also demanded the resignation of its leading state executive. Section 22 of a teachers’ labor union organized four caravans which demanded the safe return of the 43 missing students.

In Monterrey, online-organizing convened some four thousand people who gathered for a solidarity march with the 43 disappeared students through the downtown-area of a city which has often bore witness to drug war-related violence.

Cancun is Mexico’s most well-known beach, attracting as many as six million tourists every year. It is rarely a place where political resistance is organized. On the day of “Global Struggle for Ayotzinapa,” however, Cancun-residents reportedly numbering in the thousands, held a march protesting the disappearance of the 43 students.

Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero and the closest city residing near the scene of the presumed student massacre, held a march attended by thousands of people that was organized by a teachers organization.

In the picturesque and colonial-town of Puebla, thousands of protesters encircled the perimeter of the city’s Zocalo, where the Governor of the state agreed to turn off the lights of the plaza. The mother of a child who died this past July during confrontations between local police and protesters in the city, was present and spoke during the event.

Guadalajara organized its own solidarity march, attended by some five thousand people, and ending with a popular assembly meeting forged to convene future actions.

Toluca, Culiacan, Leon, Campeche, Zamora, Xalapa and Tenosique were among other major cities that also held actions of solidarity. Countless more small towns across Mexico, according to local media reports, also organized marches, assemblies and vigils in solidarity with the #YaMeCanse movement.

### **Peña Nieto and #YaMeCanse**

President Enrique Peña Nieto has not done much to quell the resistance and the movement's dizzying momentum. Instead, he has raised the ire of would-be protesters with harsh and threatening comments given just days before Thursday's widespread actions. Coming on the heels of a much-publicized and widely resented trip to China to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) conference, Peña Nieto dubbed the resistance movement, upon his return to Mexico, as accomplishing nothing more than "generating instability [and] social disorder," which is a reflection of those, "who do not want the country to grow and want to halt its development."

Elaborating further, Peña Nieto threatened to use state violence, if necessary, to quell the protests and described marches across the nation as merely "some voices" which lack a "clear objective [and] don't share [the] national project" of his administration. Peña Nieto's criticism of the movement's lack of clarity, however, comes in the face of its most clearest and frequently announced political demand: Peña Nieto's own resignation from his increasingly embattled Presidency. Even before the inception of the movement, Peña Nieto's polling figures had already dipped to its lowest point since he began his Presidency in 2012.

The "national project" to which Peña Nieto was referring when he denounced the movement has been a stream of fast-tracked and far-reaching reform packages, resulting in some 85 changes to the Constitution. Among his administration's changes included important steps toward privatizing the country's nationalized oil company to foreign interests and changing long-standing educational and financial laws in a manner which appealed to big-business interests.

Peña Nieto, who is only two years into a six-year fixed Presidential term, came close to squandering a double-digit lead in the polls over his closest challenger, just a month before the 2012 election. The lead was greatly diminished as a result of a student-led movement that nearly completely turned the tide of the election, lowering the lead to an actual election-day handful of percentage points.

Unsurprisingly then, Mexico's latest incarnation of a mass social movement, this time quite larger than the one in 2012, though similarly student and youth-led, has only attracted the scorn of the embittered President.

Peña Nieto was all but ignored yesterday, however, as the limelight was completely captured by the movement which displayed its most far-reaching political resistance. Only time will tell if the #YaMeCanse'ers will also successfully force a Presidential resignation, much less fundamental changes to a political system long rocked by drug war-induced impunity and narco-state collaboration. For the time being, there is no doubt that the creativity and tireless resistance emanating from the movement seeking justice for the 43

missing students is currently capturing the country's, and increasingly the world's, attention.

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