

Mexican Government Denies 31 Other Students Are Missing

The Office of the National Commissioner said that the school has no reports of missing students.

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Forensic examiners during an operation to look for human remains in the forested mountains outside Cocula on October. (Photo: Reuters)

Hours after [reports that 31 students from Cocula](#), in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, had been abducted by a criminal gang weeks before the attack by local police in Iguala against the [Ayotzinapa students](#), Mexican authorities released a statement late Wednesday saying they could not verify the kidnapping took place.

Mexican Minister of the Interior Miguel Angel Osorio Chong said that his office called the principal of the Justo Sierra junior high school in Cocula and that he said his lists didn't show that any students were missing.

"The principal assured us that no student is missing, but we are also investigating through the Guerrero's Attorney General's office to see if they have any complain or report regarding the abduction of 31 students," he added.

The mother of one of the victims told French TV Network France 24 that the students were kidnapped during the day right after their last day of school July 17. France 24 said interviews were conducted with several other residents of Cocula, with all of them confirming the abduction.

All witnesses said nobody in Cocula has wanted to step forward and denounce the mass kidnapping because they were threatened by heavily armed criminals, who told them their children and they would be killed if they reported the crime to authorities.

The Office of the National Security Commissioner also stated late Wednesday that the neither the school nor the local police has reports of missing minors in the area. The Commissioner's office said that it would get in touch with France 24 in order to confirm the information and, if needed, extend the investigation.

Cocula is the town where, according to Mexican authorities, the 43 missing students from teacher's training school Normal Isidro Burgos were killed and burned to ashes in September. However, this has not been confirmed, as a couple of bags apparently containing ashes and remains of burnt bodies were recovered in a nearby dump and river. The findings were sent to forensic experts in Austria, but there is still no set date for

the results of the analysis.

The alleged abduction of the 31 students occurred July 17, the last day of school in the area. A source interviewed by the network said that the students were kidnapped by people wearing blue uniforms, apparently similar to those used by the Mexican naval troops. They also said the men were driving "official" vehicles.

The woman, who asserts her daughter is among the victims, explained that nobody in Cocula denounced the crime because the men who took their children threatened to kill all of them.

"On July 17, a bunch of gunmen arrived and took my daughter and another kids when they were leaving school ... Nobody moved because everybody was afraid of the gunmen, who have threatened everybody," she said to France 24.

According to the network more witnesses of the event, who refused to speak on camera, confirmed that the number of abducted students was 31.

On the night of September 26, Iguala police shot at several buses taken by the Ayotzinapa students, killing three of them and another three civilians. According to authorities, the police then "arrested" 43 students and handed them over to the criminal gang known as Guerreros Unidos or United Warriors.

That gang, according to the Mexican attorney general, is controlled by the former mayor of Iguala and his wife, who were recently captured by the police. They are accused of being the masterminds behind the violent incidents of September 26 and early the following day.

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