

Tlatlaya: Witnesses Say Killings by the Army in Mexico State was a Mass Execution

By Laura Carlsen

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Last June 30, 22 young people were shot and killed in Mexico State by an Army unit. No soldiers were killed. The Army reported that they were attacked but news stories in Spanish and the AP reported that the circumstances were suspicious, to say the least. Representatives of the UN High Commission reportedly investigated the scene. The National Human rights Commission has opened an investigation.

Now the story has surfaced again (really, the possibility of an Army massacre of this size should never have disappeared from the news without clearing up the basic facts). The Spanish-language magazine Esquire Mexico and the AP found witnesses to the killings who reports that the Army executed the youth. "Caso Tlatlaya" as Esquire calls it after the place where the killings took place, is becoming big news.

The basic facts are not disputed. Twenty-two mostly young people hiding in a warehouse were shot to death. The allegations are that they belonged to a gang that crossed over the border from Guerrero. The biggest point of contention is whether anyone from the group ever attacked the soldiers. The witnesses and much of the forensic evidence suggests they did not.

The Mexico State government of Eruviel Avila has denied any wrong-doing. At the same time, they refused to release autopsy reports to AP, heightening suspicions. AP, reports, again following the Esquire lead,

The state government refused to release autopsy reports the AP requested under Mexico's freedom of information law, declaring them state secrets to be guarded for nine years.

A Christian Science Monitor article picks up the news of the eye-witness accounts. Now international human rights groups are jumping on the case and calling for investigations. It is not clear where the investigation of the UN High Commission mentioned in the first article currently stands. The National Human Rights Commissions refused to comment as its investigation is still in course. This version from Aristegui Noticias (in Spanish) reproduces part of the Esquire article and interviews the courageous reporter.

Recall that Mexico state is the power bastion of President Peña Nieto y Avila is his selected successor. Bad publicity in Mexico state could throw off succession plans for the 2018 presidency and cast aspersions on the president.

Also, such a serious human rights abuse by the Armed Forces in the drug war casts even more doubt on the already-unpopular strategy. It also undermines the claims we have been criticizing here since its inception: that you can effectively control human rights abuses under the drug war model. This repressive model will continue to produce human rights abuses. Call it social cleansing, extra-judicial executions or abuse of power, both the police and the armed forces have been accused of huge rise in human rights violations since the drug war began in December of 2006

The latest revelations are causing a stir, with excellent Mexican investigative journalists asking questions and even the US press echoing concerns. We will also continue to follow the story in these pages. The hope is that this will not be swept under the rug like so many cases in the past.

<http://americasmexico.blogspot.mx/2014/09/witnesses-say-killings-by-army-in.html>