

IGUALA'S PROTESTS INDICATED WORRYING EXASPERATION AMONGST MEXICAN POPULATION

By ESISC team

On Friday October 24, Guerrero State governor Angel Aguirre announced his decision to step down, in order to create “a more favorable political climate to bring about the solution to the crisis.” Since the beginning of the week, thousands of Mexican citizens have staged protests across the state, to denounce the multiple and complex linkages between local politicians and drug cartels.

In practice, this decision will not take effect before the state assembly has chosen a successor. The public announcement of Angel Aguirre's resignation is, however, indicative of the shock wave created by the formal indictment of Iguala's Mayor Jose Luis Abarca for his suspected responsibility in the killing of 6 protesting students and the disappearance of 43 others in the town on September 26. Since then, 9 mass graves containing 30 sets of human remains were found near Iguala, furthering the worst fear of many that the students were, in all likelihood, transferred to killers of the Guerreros Unidos local drug cartel.

On Wednesday, General Prosecutor Jesus Murillo Karam announced that he had delivered an official arrest warrant against Jose Luis Abarca, his wife Maria de Los Angeles Pineda Villa and a public safety officer, who are all currently at large.

According to revelations made by Guerreros Unidos' cartel leader Sidronio Casarrubias Salgado – who was arrested on Thursday October 17 along with one of his lieutenants – the mayor personally ordered the violence committed against the students, in order to prevent them from interrupting a public event organized by his wife. Moreover, Jose Luis Abarca is believed to have received the equivalent of 220,000 U.S. dollars a month in bribes from the cartel, which had become the de facto governing body of the city.

Since then, federal authorities have arrested 52 of Iguala's officials and police officers, proving the extent of mafia networks inside the city's administration. Furthermore, some detainees declared that Maria de Los Angeles Pineda Villa acted as the leader of the Guerreros Unidos for Iguala. She is suspected to have personally ordered a series of crimes, including kidnappings and murders. It is worth mentioning that she is also the sister of two other alleged leaders of the cartel.

These revelations, as well as the failure of the government to recover the missing students, have elicited an unprecedented wave of outrage among the population, causing outbursts of violence in the midst of peaceful protest marches. For example, Mexican media reported that 10 people were arrested on Wednesday after plundering shops during a large scale demonstration, while another group of protesters was setting fire to a municipal building.

More than ever, this case has indeed brought to light the sense of impunity on the part of many politicians, who are directly involved in open collusions with criminal groups and in trafficking of all kinds. Meanwhile, the population is increasingly exasperated with the corruption and violent practices of local police units that serve the interest of drug cartels. Arguably, the present crisis has amplified the feeling of confusion between police forces, cartels and private militias, which are all using indiscriminate violence to further their private interests and achieve criminal objectives.

The explosion of popular anger is also a clear indication of the inadequacy of the Mexican government's response to this problem. Although Mexico's authorities have drawn a comprehensive security strategy to curb drug trade, all the efforts made in the past years appear to have the effect of strengthening all kind of armed forces which are targeting the civilian population. According to official figures, 70,000 people died since the drug war started in 2006. However, several human rights groups claim that over 100,000 people were killed and that kidnappings have become commonplace.

It is in this context that the Institutional Revolutionary Party of President Enrique Peña Nieto returned to power in 2012 after 12 years in the opposition. Although his government was elected partially due to his promise to restore peace and stability and to guarantee effective democratic transition, he has been widely criticized since then for its ineffectiveness with the drug cartels.

While the situation remains widely stable in the capital of Mexico City, recent facts prove that the federal authorities have lost virtually all control in many areas of the country, in favor of local officials that behave like feudal lords. Although the situation in Iguala has reached an extreme level of gravity and horror, it is only one of many examples of an area where authoritarianism, corruption and organized crime have continued to proliferate.

We will see in the coming weeks if the resignation of Guerrero State's governor will actually provide a much greater awareness of the need for change in the attitude of the public authorities. Otherwise, the public's exasperation will likely continue to grow, with the risk of becoming a major factor of instability on the national scale.

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