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Mexico

Justice for Miriam Rodríguez

- News from around the world -

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Solidarity activists are raising their voices against the assassination on May 10 of Miriam Elizabeth Rodríguez Martínez, a human rights activist in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas well known for holding the authorities to account after the murder of her daughter. The following open letter calls on state and federal authorities in Mexico and the U.S. government to ensure the safety of those who stand for human rights.

ON THE night of May 10, 2017, heavily armed men broke into the home of Miriam Elizabeth Rodríguez Martínez and shot her 12 times. Several family members survived the attack, but she died soon after en route to the hospital. Miriam was the leader of the San Fernando Collective for the Disappeared (Colectivo de Desaparecidos de San Fernando), a group she founded after her 14-year-old daughter, Karen, was abducted in 2012.

In the face of local and state authorities' indifference, Miriam organized a search on her own, eventually locating Karen's remains in an unmarked grave. She subsequently uncovered evidence leading to the conviction of members of Los Zetas, a gang linked closely to both the Gulf cartel and ex-members of Mexico's Special Forces.

On March 22, 29 prisoners from the Ciudad Victoria prison in the state of Tamaulipas escaped, including some of those implicated in Karen's murder. Despite repeated requests for adequate protection for Miriam and her family, local authorities failed to keep them safe.

Unfortunately, Miriam's death is hardly an isolated incident. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, more than 23,000 Mexican's were killed in 2016 alone, and nearly 30,000 disappeared over the years in the state's so-called war on drugs. This war has been financed, and at least partly directed, by Democratic and Republican administrations in Washington to the tune of more than \$1.5 billion. Miriam's assassination stands alongside the military assault and sexual abuse of the residents of Atenco in 2006 and the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa in 2014 as another in a long line of abuses of human rights.

Tragically, her death could have been prevented, but Mexican authorities failed in their duties. In fact, all the signs point to the authorities looking the other way. As Guillermo Gutiérrez Riestra—whose own daughter Raquel was disappeared in 2011 and who is now president of the Families and Friends of the Disappeared of Tamaulipas (Familiares y amigos de desaparecidos en Tamaulipas)—explained:

“She directed her denunciations against the government. Tamaulipas is a narco-state. We have been in a war for 10 years. She told the truth about the government, about its ineptitude, its lack of responsibility. Now they have shut her up. A powerful voice has been quieted by this crime. They have silenced the voice of San Fernando, a place where atrocious crimes have been committed.”

We, the undersigned, hold Tamaulipas Governor Francisco García Cabeza de Vaca, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, and all local, state and federal police authorities responsible for their failure to protect Miriam and her family.

We further hold them responsible for the future safety of Miriam's family, all members of the San Fernando Collective for the Disappeared, the Families and Friends of the Disappeared of Tamaulipas (Familiares y amigos de desaparecidos en Tamaulipas), and all others speaking out against the epidemic of femicide, forced disappearances and violence against civilians in the state of Tamaulipas.

We further call on President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Roberta Jacobson to immediately terminate all military aid to Mexico, and we hold them jointly responsible for violations of human rights carried out with said aid.

Finally, we stand in solidarity with the families and friends of the disappeared of the state of Tamaulipas and pledge to shine a light on all those responsible for violations of human rights and the people's democratic rights to free speech and assembly.

Signatories* (list in formation)

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