

# **UNDENIABLE TRUTHS: FOR A MEXICO WITHOUT IMPUNITY**

## **Final Report of the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification**

**2024**

**Volume 1**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Presentation**

As a result of the agreement established between collectives of survivors, relatives and victims of the Dirty War and the Mexican Government, a Presidential Decree was published on October 6, 2021, creating the Commission for Access to Truth, Historical Clarification and the Promotion of Justice for Grave Human Rights Violations committed between 1965 and 1990 (COVEHJ in Spanish), which among its bodies established the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification (MEH in Spanish).

In order to comply with said Decree and present a Final Report of historical clarification about the Grave Human Rights Violations committed between 1965 and 1990, the MEH organized the investigation process in three general stages. The first, carried out during 2022, consisted of the preparation of the Work Plan and the design of methodologies, instruments, tools and protocols for testimonial and documentary research. Then, 2023 – “the year of listening” – was the stage in which we visited different states of the Republic in order to carry out the bulk of the documentary and testimonial work. At the end of that year, we began to systematize and analyze the information collected and, finally, in 2024 we concluded our systematization and analysis of information sources and proceeded to the drafting of the Final Report.

Each one of the pages that make up this investigation seeks to reach the broadest sectors of society, with the aim of offering a social and political explanation of State violence deployed between 1960 and 1990. At the same time, this Report carries a message to the Mexican State, which must recognize its institutional responsibility for the wrongs committed. Likewise, this Report is directed to survivors, their families and to the collectives, organizations and support networks that have fought and raised their voices for memory, truth, justice and reparation.

#### **Research Topics**

As a function of the organization of areas of investigation that was established within the MEH, the Research Team that presents this Report assumed the tasks of clarifying Grave Violations of Human Rights committed in Mexico in the period between 1965 and 1990 against political dissidents from four sectors: students, Political-Military Organizations (OPM in Spanish), labor-union organizations, and support networks in defense of Human Rights.

#### *Student Movements*

Since the early 1960s, the student mobilization that took shape in Mexico – demanding a democratic process for generating policies that would improve the quality of teaching and guarantee access to

education for the entire population – was systematically repressed by police units and the Armed Forces, as well as by infiltrators and shock groups at the service of the State.

The phenomenon of radicalization of State violence manifested against this sector with the genocide of October 2, 1968, the 1971 massacre in Mexico City, and the multiple Grave Human Rights Violations committed against students in a systematic and widespread manner.

#### *Political-Military Organizations*

The OPMs were groups that, given the impossibility of dialogue, the lack of democratic alternatives for the opposition and the radicalization of State violence, opted for armed struggle as a path to seek the implementation of changes at an economic and social level for the benefit of broad sectors of society.

Although the OPMs were the main targets of the military counterinsurgency operations implemented in Mexico starting in the 1970s, the impact of State violence deployed against them was extensive, and reached entire populations.

#### *Labor-Union Movements*

In the 1960s and 1970s, State violence against dissidents in the labor-union movement was constant, with the Police, shock groups and armed individuals acting in collusion with union leaders to repress workers who opposed corporatist practices and demonstrated to demand better labor conditions.

Practices that violated Human Rights were used against them, such as political persecution through espionage and intimidation; torture, exercised in the form of physical attacks; extrajudicial executions; and other types of political violence such as unjustified dismissals and constant threats, carried out with the aim of weakening the protests and silencing their demands.

#### *Organizations of family members and survivors defending Human Rights*

Beginning in the 1970s, support networks emerged in various regions of the country that consolidated as organizations defending Human Rights victims of state violence. Some of the demands they have maintained since then are the call for justice, the proof of life of disappeared persons, and the release of political prisoners. For their resistance and their efforts to keep the repressive actions of the State visible, these organizations have also suffered violence, being subjected to harassment, threat and persecution. For that reason, this Research Team of the MEH considered it essential to clarify the violence exercised against members of these organizations during the period investigated.

### **Content of the Final Report**

The findings of the investigation, detailed in this Report, demonstrate that Grave Human Rights Violations perpetrated between 1965 and 1990 against the sectors described above were the result of widespread and systematic actions by the Mexican State, which during those years employed repression and the elimination of political opponents as a policy.

#### *The Repressive System of counterinsurgency in Mexico, 1965-1990*

The first chapter of the Report addresses the repressive counterinsurgency system in Mexico, due to the importance this system had and so that its functioning is clearly established from the start.

Counterinsurgency policy was conceived within the framework of a strategy that was deployed via a mechanism coordinated and sustained by different ministries – such as the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) and the Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA) – through their agencies and organizations (the Armed Forces, Federal Directorate of Security (DFS), General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations (DGIPS), Special Brigade, and the different police forces, to name a few) and parastatal actors linked to counterinsurgent violence (for example: gunmen, shock groups, the Olympic Battalion, paramilitary forces such as the Halcones).

In that context, institutions and agents of the State committed Grave Human Rights Violations, despite the fact that their actions violated established legal frameworks. As a consequence, most of its operations were carried out clandestinely, with the aim of not leaving evidence that could link them as responsible for executing that State policy.

This system is exemplified by two cases. First, in the section “*Death Flights: Forced Disappearance of Persons in the Context of Counterinsurgency, 1971-1980*”, the clandestine practice of annihilation carried out by the Mexican State in that period is documented and analyzed. Its objective is to reconstruct the dynamics of the execution of the *Death Flights* by which detained and disappeared persons were thrown into the sea, the chain of state actors and military institutions that were involved in the planning and execution of the extermination, as well as the findings that have been made to date about this practice.

Second, the section “*The Operations Plan ‘Rosa de los Vientos’: Sinaloa and Forced Disappearance*” provides a detailed overview of one of the cases of repressive planning that was executed in Sinaloa. It involved the arbitrary detention of 23 people and the forced disappearance of seven of them. This case allows us to understand the forms that repressive coordination and the circuit of detention-disappearance took, documenting the serious violations of human rights for which there is still no justice.

### *State violence through history*

The second chapter of the Report can be considered the guiding axis of the document, as it explains and analyzes the different moments in which Grave Human Rights Violations were committed. Throughout the research process, we observed that State violence, perpetrated against various sectors of the political opposition between 1965 and 1990, went through a process of consolidation, radicalization, and reconfiguration that this Report analyzes and reconstructs historically with a timeframe in four stages.

The first covers 1938 to 1965. In these years, State violence was a central element in the very process of the configuration and consolidation of the Mexican authoritarian regime; that is, it constituted a recurring element that was used to eliminate, limit and discourage the activity of organized sectors that were supporting demands and recognition during this time period. As stated in the section, “*Development of the authoritarian regime and State violence, 1938-1965*,” that violence – coupled with the structural violence that prevailed in Mexico in the post-revolutionary period – generated processes and responses in different sectors of the population, which organized themselves with the objective of definitively stopping multiple forms of state violence, as well as the economic and political processes that ran counter to a socially and economically just and democratic country.

Faced with growing social organization in defense of longstanding claims, the State increased its levels of violence with the objective of sustaining a political regime and an economic model that mainly favored the elites. Those interests converged within the international context of the Cold War and of National Security Doctrine – introducing the concept of the internal enemy – which the Mexican State adopted as a way of recasting the opposition and political dissidence as threats to its stability. From that perspective, beginning in the mid-1960s the practices of state violence that were recurrent in the post-revolutionary stage began to be reorganized under a counterinsurgency strategy.

In the second stage, developed in the section “Consolidation of authoritarianism and configuration of the counterinsurgency strategy, 1965-1972,” we expose how the repressive structures of the Mexican State went through a transformation process within the framework of the configuration of a counterinsurgency strategy whose central objective was the extermination of political dissidence.

Starting in 1965, after the assault on the army barracks in Madera, Chihuahua, the military forces and the civil security agencies entered into a process of adaptation and radicalization that consolidated at the beginning of the seventies, when the State escalated its counterinsurgency strategy against armed insurgency and social movements. In this period, the intensification of state violence and the launching of the first counterinsurgency operations carried out by state agents led to an increase in Grave Human Rights Violations and crimes against humanity perpetrated against organized sectors of the population.

The third stage, described in the section “Radicalization of authoritarianism and escalation of counterinsurgency, 1973-1985,” addresses the emergence of a large number of OPMs that rose up against the regime, which they described as authoritarian, repressive, and unwilling to resolve the demands of the population. Instead of addressing the causes and reasons for such discontent, the State intensified the deployment of its military and security forces with the objective of eliminating any armed group and political or social dissident.

It has been documented that throughout the seventies, the Mexican State implemented operations, mainly of a military nature (such as the “Telaraña” Plan, the Atoyac Plan, the Diamante Operation, among others), with the objective of confronting the OPMs that were active in various regions of the country. The state violence exercised against them took on a generalized and systematic dimension, since it was applied in a coordinated manner between the Army, civilian security agencies and various paramilitary groups, such as the Olympic Battalion, the Halcones, gunmen and the White Guards.

One of the most significant examples of administrative coordination and planning was the creation of special counterinsurgency groups, such as the Intelligence Information Group (GII in Spanish), made up of elements of the Army assigned to the 2nd Military Police Battalion commanded by the then-Infantry Colonel Francisco Quirós Hermosillo, who, in coordination with the then-Police Commander in the state of Guerrero, Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro, systematically conducted the clandestine practice of annihilation known as the *Death Flights*, which is described in a special section in this Report.

The 1970s saw a notable increase in the number of forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and acts of physical and sexual torture, among other crimes against humanity. In addition, these Grave Violations of Human Rights directly affected members of the civilian population, including minors, women and the elderly.

During this same period, clandestine detention centers proliferated, among which Army bases have been primarily identified, such as Military Camp No. 1 and various Military Zones (9/a, Culiacán, Sinaloa; 27/a, Acapulco, Guerrero; 35/a Chilpancingo, Guerrero), as well as the former headquarters of the DFS located on Calle Circular de Morelia, in the Colonia Roma, Mexico City, and the building that housed the General Directorate of Police and Traffic of the Federal District, also in Mexico City, among other spaces.

Finally, the section “Persistence of State violence in the crisis of authoritarianism, 1986-1990” starts with the fact that in the mid-eighties, the practices of violence and counterinsurgency operations that had been implemented in Mexico during the previous decade underwent a new transformation process. International pressures in the face of crimes against humanity that had been reported by family members and former members of OPMs, as well as the scandals generated by the connections of state agents to drug trafficking and organized crime operations, led to a new stage in which the State sought to transform and professionalize its security agencies.

The dismantling of the DFS in 1985, as well as the political opening promoted through the Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (1978), focused the attention of opposition organizations on the electoral level. A part of the popular movements renewed the search for national transformation through democratic means. In this sense, the way in which violence had been exercised, through increasingly selective military counterinsurgency operations, took a turn toward harassment, threats and murders of political opponents.

The magnitude of what happened in Mexico during those years makes it impossible to provide a detailed and exhaustive account of the Grave Violations of Human Rights committed during the period investigated. For this reason, the decision was made to present each section with cases that illustrate the characteristics and patterns of violence that were identified in each of them.

#### *A story of resistance and struggle for memory, truth and justice: collectives of the Dirty War*

This Report includes a third chapter that seeks to highlight the importance of the struggle for memory, truth and justice that has been sustained for decades by relatives, survivors, groups, and companions of survivors of this period of violence. Throughout these years of struggle, they have not only encountered the State’s response of denial, silencing, impunity for those responsible, and inaction in the face of their demands, but also persecution, surveillance, harassment, repression, continuous insult and revictimization. In this sense, this Report recognizes them as the principal guardians of memory, who with their struggle and resistance have sustained their demand for justice and prevented the erasure of the crimes committed by the Mexican State during this period.

#### *Psychosocial impacts of State violence*

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the psychosocial impacts produced by State violence. Experience gained during the research process has made it necessary to recognize that the violence deployed by the State within the framework of counterinsurgency had innumerable impacts and effects on the lives of people, at the individual, family and community level; impacts that do not refer only to the moment in which the acts of violence occurred, but that remain over time and are even transmitted between generations. For this reason, this report includes a section that seeks to make visible the psychosocial

consequences of the State violence unleashed between 1965 and 1990, also with the objective of measuring the consequences of impunity.

#### *The Armed Forces on the path to historical clarification*

In the fifth chapter, a special space is given to the relations that were developed between the COVEHJ and the Armed Forces. As has been proven for years, the Armed Forces had an undisputed dominance in exercising repression and in the execution of counterinsurgency operations that resulted in Grave Violations of Human Rights during the period investigated. Therefore, the provision established in the Presidential Decree for SEDENA to assist with the work of historical clarification, particularly with the opening of its archives and access to Military Zones, generated high expectations.

This chapter describes the process of collaboration between the Armed Forces and COVEHJ, as well as the complications in achieving the proposed objectives for the historical clarification of the multiple Grave Violations of Human Rights committed between 1965 and 1990.

#### *List of disappeared persons*

This Report presents a list of more than a thousand people who were detained and disappeared during the period under investigation. The list was compiled through the review, comparison and unification of different databases produced at different times by organizations of family members and survivors, and within the framework of the truth mechanisms that have been previously implemented in Mexico. The Report also used a “Flight Index” found during the research process in the archives of the Eureka Committee, which contains important data on the identity and places of detention of people who remain missing. In short, this is an effort that seeks to help discern and clarify the magnitude and general characteristics of the forced disappearances committed by the Mexican State during the period under investigation.

#### *List of perpetrators and people involved in the repressive system*

This list includes more than two thousand public officials from different levels of government, as well as people involved in the repressive system identified throughout the investigation process of this Report, which added information provided to the MEH by the National Search Commission (CNB in Spanish) within the framework of the work of the COVEHJ.

#### *Contributions and findings*

The field of knowledge that has been generated around State violence is broad. This is because in the last twenty years, research has been developed from various disciplines that has sought to explain the conditions that enabled government agencies such as the DFS, the Army, and paramilitary groups such as the Special Brigade (also known as the *Brigada Blanca*, or White Brigade) to construct surveillance and annihilation strategies against all forms of opposition and social insurgency. In this sense, it has been shown that the operations of these agencies directly participated in the escalation and systematization of violence that occurred in Mexico from the 1970s onwards.

Therefore, the contributions of the work of this Research Team seek to add to this previously generated knowledge. In general terms, it is a historical reconstruction that draws on all the investigations that preceded us (particularly those carried out by the Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past, the National Commission on Human Rights, and the Truth

Commission of the state of Guerrero), with the aim of offering an explanation directed to the entire society that allows us to understand the causes, facts and consequences that State violence has had on the nation's future. In addition, an attempt has been made to contribute data that adds to the records of victims and perpetrators, or to complement or reinforce information on various specific cases, that allow us to demonstrate the ways in which Grave Violations of Human Rights were committed.

To mention some of the main contributions, we can highlight the expansion of the known map of violence, since cases were recorded that had not previously been documented. New oral histories were created from the memory of survivors of various processes of state violence, as we collected testimonies in areas that had not been extensively worked in or obtained the testimony of people who had not previously shared their experience. Likewise, new registries were compared and integrated into the lists of perpetrators and victims. These resources have been developed and enriched by organizations, collectives and investigations that have focused on denouncing and clarifying the acts of violence carried out by the Mexican State during the second half of the 20th century.

Other contributions in this regard are:

- There are clear elements that point to the existence of a policy of using State violence as part of the configuration of the Mexican regime in the period 1965-1990.
- Between 1965 and 1990, the political violence of the State, carried out in a widespread, systematic and planned manner, was aimed at dismantling and annihilating political groups considered dangerous for the national project upheld by the governments of the moment.
- Hundreds of specific cases of forced disappearance, extrajudicial execution, torture and arbitrary detention were documented with testimonial information and archival sources. And it was possible to point to collective and individual perpetrators linked to the institutions holding political power.
- Serious physical, emotional, economic and social damage was reported from family members and survivors, as a result of the political violence of the State and the perpetration of Grave Violations of Human Rights.
- The exhaustion of institutional channels and the violent repression of social movements increased insurgent actions. This, in turn, triggered reasons to intensify and justify the repressive response by the authorities. The violence exercised by the OPMs constituted a response to the State's repression and not the other way around.
- The systematic nature of State violence is demonstrated through the design and planning of specific operations organized and executed by different State forces against distinct sectors and organizations.
- Different State forces and institutions consistently coordinated operations against dissident subjects in which Grave Violations of Human Rights were perpetrated. Among the entities that entered into coordination were: SEDENA, EMP (Presidential General Staff), SEGOB, DGIPS, DFS, judicial, municipal and state police, public officials, judges and caciques.
- New data has been collected that enriches knowledge about the routes of detention and forced disappearance, as well as the existence of clandestine detention centers where practices such as physical and sexual torture were carried out. In this regard, several sites used to this end were identified inside military camps.

- A list of 1,103 missing persons was created, which was the result of a review, comparison and unification of different databases produced at different times by social organizations and initiatives within the framework of truth mechanisms, as well as information on missing persons identified in the research work carried out by this MEH Team.
- A list of more than 2,200 public officials from different levels of government was created, as well as other people involved in the repressive system identified throughout the research process of this Report. To this was added information provided by the CNB within the framework of the work of the COVEHJ.

## Key findings

This Research Team considers as findings the information found during the course of our investigation that was not previously known, and which contributes to the clarification of facts constituting Grave Violations of Human Rights and crimes against humanity. The presentation of this new evidence contributes to the promotion of processes of justice and reparation of damages.

Some of the key findings that can be highlighted in a general way, but which are developed in detail throughout the Final Report are the following:

- *Death flights*: potential list of victims? Documentary and testimonial investigation conducted on the subject of the *Death Flights* yielded new information and an important discovery. *Death Flights* were a practice of annihilation and forced disappearance directly associated with the extermination policy implemented by the Mexican State, starting in the early 1970s. This extermination policy, in turn, was part of a broader counterinsurgency strategy employed by the State since the mid-1960s. Our research indicates that the *Death Flights* were implemented in two stages. The first stage would have occurred between 1971 and 1974, mainly through the use of helicopters. The second would have occurred beginning in the second half of 1974, with the implementation of the Atoyac Operations Plan, which reinforced the counterinsurgency strategies in the state of Guerrero aimed at eliminating the Peasant Brigade of Execution (BCA in Spanish), led by Lucio Cabañas. This Report draws on a “Flight Index,” which was found among the archives of the Eureka Committee human rights organization. The document was attached to a complaint from a person linked to the repressive system, and includes the names and surnames of disappeared people who, according to the person denouncing the actions, were thrown into the sea. The analysis, corroboration, and contextualization of this document are essential to understanding the dimensions and repercussions of the information it contains. It is also imperative that competent State authorities evaluate this document in order to assume their responsibility for the *Death Flights* and carry out the required judicial investigations.
- *List of detainees in Military Camp No. 1 in 1978*. A document located in the AGN provides a list of people who were detained in Military Camp No. 1 in Mexico City, in that year. Of those 23 people, at least seven remain detained and disappeared to date: Jorge Hermelindo Varela Varela, Luis Benito Espinoza Lucero, María Olga Navarro Fierro, Leticia Galarza Campos, Saúl Meza Enríquez, Alicia de los Ríos Merino and Óscar Gaxiola Murillo. This document is very relevant for the historical clarification of what happened to many of the September 23rd Communist League (LC23S in Spanish) militants in 1978, among other things because it allows us to ensure that they were detained in Military Camp No. 1.



- *The “Rosa de los Vientos” Operations Plan.* According to this document, the DFS laid out its objective to "locate, detain and place under custody the members of the Communist League 'September 23' from June 1, 1978 until their complete extermination." While the Plan is evidence that the State had chosen to *exterminate* the LC23S, it also allows us to clearly observe the coordination between SEGOB and SEDENA in the application of State violence in the country: it was a national coordination targeting the OPMs and other political and social activists. At the same time, the Plan confirms what the testimonies of dozens of people detained in Sinaloa have said for almost 50 years: that the 9th Military Zone was the zenith of State violence implemented in the 1970s and 1980s.

- *The location of the tomb of Pablo Alvarado Barrera.* Social activist, rural teacher, militant of Arturo Gámiz's Popular Guerrilla Group in 1965 and participant in the preparation of the assault on the Madera Barracks. Pablo Alvarado Barrera was the object of surveillance and persecution by the DFS since 1963. On July 13, 1967, Pablo was detained, interrogated, and tortured and, seven days later, sent to the Lecumberri Prison. On December 4, 1971, in a coordinated operation between the Lecumberri authorities, prison officials, common prisoners in the service of the director of the prison, and the DFS, Pablo Alvarado and three other people were extrajudicially executed. According to the death certificate, Pablo Alvarado was buried in the Civil Pantheon of San Isidro, in the Federal District. His relatives went to the pantheon several times in the company of Mrs. Rosario Ibarra, despite having no answers regarding the location of the tomb and, each time they went, they were denied any type of information from the pantheon administrators. This Report provides clarification of the circumstances of the extrajudicial execution of Alvarado Barrera, the entry of his body to the Civil Pantheon of San Isidro in the Federal District, the location of his grave and the location of his birth certificate.

## **General information on the work performed**

Research by the MEH took place between 2022 and 2023. To that end, we established contact with groups, organizations, people and agencies based in the states in order to generate collaboration agreements.

### *Gathering of testimonies*

The Research Team that presents this Report collected 226 individual and collective testimonies in 14 states of the Republic (Chiapas, Chihuahua, Ciudad de México, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Veracruz and Yucatán). The testimonies of survivors and family members who were victims of State violence occupied a primordial place in the investigation, since they offered a first-hand account by people who lived through or witnessed various repressive acts. The preservation of their memory is essential to promoting justice initiatives, contributing to comprehensive reparation of damages, and as an exercise of sensitization and awareness in society that helps guarantee non-repetition.

### *Documentary research*

The review, analysis and registration of documentary sources is of great relevance for historical work, since it allows us to support hypotheses and arguments through material evidence that was generated at the time a series of events occurred. Regarding the themes developed in this Report, the consultation of private and institutional archives contributed to verifying the participation and responsibility of state

entities in various cases of Grave Violations of Human Rights and crimes against humanity. Twenty-six public archives were consulted, both physical and digital, including the General Archives of the Nation, Archives of Repression (Article 19) and the National Security Archive (NSA). In addition, 15 archives of relatives, survivors and groups in various regions of the country were consulted. In some cases, these were digitized with the authorization of their owners, with the aim of making the information available to the public and ensuring that the ways in which State violence was exercised against students, organized workers, OPM militants, activists, and their families is known..

This team was made up of the Commissioner, nine researchers hired by the SEGOB, and three volunteer researchers. We also relied on collaborators who did not receive any type of financial compensation, but who had a marked interest in and commitment to being part of this exercise of historical clarification. In addition, we had support from colleagues in community service roles and beneficiaries of the social program Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro.

- Eugenia Allier Montañó
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