

## MEXICO

*Teachers in more than 75 schools were threatened, more than 50 students, teachers, academics and education officials were killed or abducted with their whereabouts unknown, and nanotechnology researchers were targeted with bombs in 2009-2012.*

### CONTEXT

Attacks on teachers, academics and students took place in the context of high levels of general violence, including the abduction without trace of large numbers of children and adults.<sup>1061</sup> Heavily armed criminal groups fought over territory and control of the drug trade – the main source of heroin and cocaine entering the United States – and against security forces trying to dismantle them.<sup>1062</sup> The drug cartels, which have thousands of armed men, have increasingly diversified their operations, turning to other illicit trades such as kidnappings and extortion. The federal government began intensive security operations against them in 2006, backed by 96,000 troops.<sup>1063</sup> In the course of counternarcotics operations, security forces committed widespread human rights violations, including killings, torture and forced disappearances.<sup>1064</sup> According to the government, more than 70,000 people were killed in drug-related violence from December 2006 to December 2012, and more than 26,000 more were victims of disappearances or otherwise went missing.<sup>1065</sup>

Teachers were among a long list of targets, reportedly because of their regular salary.<sup>1066</sup> Parents and children were attacked at schools and police were targeted while trying to protect educational establishments. In many cases, there was insufficient evidence to establish who was responsible for the attacks because few crimes were properly investigated by the authorities.

In primary education, net enrolment was 96 per cent in 2011 and in secondary education it was 67 per cent; gross enrolment at tertiary level was 28 per cent. Adult literacy was 93 per cent in 2009.<sup>1067</sup>

### ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

During 2009-2012, there was evidence of three direct attacks on school buildings plus additional threats against schools.

In early December 2010, for example, gunmen set fire to a kindergarten in Ciudad Juárez on the northern border because teachers refused to pay extortion fees,<sup>1068</sup> and in September 2011, threats of grenade attacks on schools in Santiago, in the north-eastern state of Nuevo León, caused panic among parents.<sup>1069</sup>

Additionally, in July 2012, a kindergarten and a primary school were destroyed in Turicato, Michoacán state, by a Catholic sect called the Followers of the Virgin of the Rosary. Members used sledgehammers and pick-axes to destroy six classrooms, six bathrooms, furniture and computers and then burned down the buildings after a leader claimed she had received an order from the Virgin Mary to destroy them. The sect, whose rules prohibit formal schooling, refused to accept the secular government curriculum, especially on science and sexuality, or government uniforms, preferring robes and a headscarf.<sup>1070</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, there were numerous gun battles in the vicinity of schools, in some cases resulting in the deaths of students, teachers or parents. In Reynosa, in 2009, 20 teachers reportedly struggled to keep up to a thousand students lying on the floor with their heads down while, for over two hours, grenades exploded and classroom walls were peppered with bullets around them.<sup>1071</sup> On 30

August 2010, a shootout between gunmen and marines in Tampico, Tamaulipas state, as students were leaving school, left two children dead and two adults wounded.<sup>1072</sup>

## **ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL**

At least 14 school students,<sup>1073</sup> 12 school teachers<sup>1074</sup> and two education officials<sup>1075</sup> were killed in attacks on education in 2009-2012. One teacher who was a leading teacher trade unionist was abducted and his whereabouts remain unknown.<sup>1076</sup> Several school students were also abducted.<sup>1077</sup>

### **The threat of violence related to criminal groups**

Armed criminal groups in many cases demanded that teachers pay them a proportion of their salary or face kidnapping or other violence. But there were also killings of students and teachers by gunmen whose affiliation and motive were unexplained.

In Ciudad Juárez, in November 2010, there were both threats against individual teachers and threats posted on school walls warning that students would be kidnapped if teachers failed to hand over money to the perpetrators.<sup>1078</sup> One vice-principal of a primary school said criminals 'wrote graffiti on the school's walls saying: "If you don't pay up a massacre will happen".'<sup>1079</sup> In December 2010, the Chihuahua state senate called on the Governor and President to adopt a security plan to protect educational institutions in Ciudad Juárez from extortion.<sup>1080</sup>

On 30 August 2011, at least 80 primary schools in Acapulco, in the south-western state of Guerrero, closed when up to 400 teachers went on strike in protest against threats of extortion and kidnapping.<sup>1081</sup> One week later, it was reported that

this figure had increased to 300 schools, affecting 30,000 students in the area.<sup>1082</sup> The trigger for the strike was reportedly a blanket demand issued to primary schools ordering teachers to give up 50 per cent of their pay before 1 October and part of their Christmas bonus, or face the consequences. The threat was reportedly made by phone, leaflets dropped off at schools and banners posted outside them.<sup>1083</sup> One teacher, who was a paymaster for teachers, received a letter requesting details of all teaching staff working in a specific area of the Acapulco education system who earned more than 8,000 pesos bi-weekly, and all of those earning more than 20,000 pesos. The letter also demanded the teachers' names, addresses and cell phone numbers, their voter registration cards and the names and addresses of their schools, plus the names of anyone who declined to divulge information.<sup>1084</sup> According to the online newspaper Examiner.com, the threat was confirmed by an official in Guerrero's Department of Education for the region of Acapulco-Coyuca de Benítez, and it was believed that a violent criminal group known as La Barredora had sent the message.<sup>1085</sup>

Acapulco officials argued that teachers were over-reacting.<sup>1086</sup> However, the payroll officer at La Patria es Primero primary school, Acapulco, who was told to hand over information about teachers' salaries, fled the city.<sup>1087</sup> Teachers demanded that military personnel be stationed outside schools.<sup>1088</sup>

The threats were made amid a climate of pervasive violence. Three weeks earlier, gunmen reportedly broke into a school and snatched a student whose body was later found in La Sabana.<sup>1089</sup> At the start of term, teachers in at least 75 Acapulco schools received threats, according to a CNN report.<sup>1090</sup> In September 2011, police found a sack of five decomposed men's heads dumped outside a primary school in Acapulco along with threatening

messages.<sup>1091</sup> Also in September, it was reported that in a three-month period 43 teachers had been ‘express kidnapped’, meaning they were held for a limited period but released after a payment was made.<sup>1092</sup>

In Acapulco, 12 schools reportedly did not reopen after the Christmas break due to the continuing demand that teachers hand over half their salaries and all of their bonuses. On 2 January 2012, the body of one murdered Acapulco teacher, Maria Viruel Andraca, 51, was left in the boot of a taxi on the Acapulco-Mexico highway with a note reportedly left by a criminal group,<sup>1093</sup> sparking new protests by teachers on the need for security measures to be implemented.<sup>1094</sup>

Elsewhere, gunmen attacked parents waiting for their children outside a Ciudad Juárez elementary school on 25 August 2011, wounding one man and four women.<sup>1095</sup>

Police officers assigned to protect schools and students were also killed. On 24 February 2010, a police officer, PC Marco Antonio Olague, was shot dead in front of dozens of pupils as they were going into a primary school in Chihuahua city, although the reason was unclear.<sup>1096</sup> Separately, on 12 September 2010, three police officers deployed to provide security at schools and campuses were shot dead while parked at a primary school in Ciudad Juárez while waiting for a colleague who had gone inside. Gunmen using AK-47 rifles sprayed the patrol vehicle with bullets. When crime investigators arrived, the gunmen reportedly returned and opened fire again.<sup>1097</sup>

Two teachers who were trade union members were killed and one teacher who was a leading teacher trade unionist was abducted, and his whereabouts remain unknown. These incidents appeared to be

linked to intra-trade union rivalries over the control of education in Oaxaca state as part of the wider struggle between those for and against more autonomy for the indigenous population.<sup>1098</sup>

## ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Attacks on higher education included kidnappings and murder of students and academics by gunmen; bombings aimed at nanotechnology researchers and facilities; and violence by police or security forces against students.

### Killings and kidnappings of students and staff

A compilation of media reports suggests that seven academics or university personnel were murdered,<sup>1099</sup> four were injured<sup>1100</sup> and six were threatened;<sup>1101</sup> in addition, at least 15 higher education students were killed,<sup>1102</sup> one was tortured and four were injured.<sup>1103</sup> Some kidnappings ended in the victims being killed.<sup>1104</sup> In some cases, it could not be verified whether the crime was linked to the victim’s education role or place of education. According to the Justice in Mexico Project, the level of violence reportedly caused some professors at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where three professors were killed in a year, to leave their positions.<sup>1105</sup>

At least seven higher education students were kidnapped.<sup>1106</sup> In one incident on 5 March 2012, three technical school students and one high school student, aged between 13 and 21, were abducted from their schools by heavily armed men and killed in Cuernavaca, Morelos, in central Mexico. Their dismembered bodies were found in plastic bags together with a message from a drug cartel.<sup>1107</sup>

### Anti-nanotechnology bombings

In 2011, according to a compilation of media reports, six university campuses or research institutes were targeted with bombings and one researcher was separately assassinated in violence allegedly directed at staff involved in nanotechnology research.<sup>1108</sup> A group called 'Individuals Tending towards the Wild' (ITS or 'Individuales tendiendo a lo salvaje' in Spanish) reportedly claimed responsibility for seven bombings and the assassination.<sup>1109</sup>

For instance, on 8 August 2011, two professors at the Monterrey Institute of Technology were wounded when a package containing a tube of dynamite in a 20 centimetre-long pipe exploded. ITS, which was also linked to attacks against nanotechnology in France and Spain, claimed responsibility.<sup>1110</sup> The group was reportedly motivated by a fear that development of nanotechnology could lead to nanoparticles reproducing uncontrollably and threatening life on Earth.<sup>1111</sup>

According to Nature magazine, ITS also claimed responsibility for two bomb attacks against the head of engineering and nanotechnology at the Polytechnic University of the Valley of Mexico in Tultitlán in April and May 2011, the first of which wounded a security guard. In May 2011, ITS issued a general threat to professors and students warning them about any suspicious packages on campus: 'because one of these days we are going to make them pay for everything they want to do to the earth'.<sup>1112</sup>

After the Monterrey bombing, the group reportedly listed five more researchers it was targeting at the Institute and six other universities.<sup>1113</sup> The group also claimed responsibility for the killing of Ernesto Mendéz Salinas, a researcher at the Biotechnology

Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in November 2011.<sup>1114</sup>

### Human rights violations by police and security forces

One university student was wounded when police fired warning shots at a student demonstration against violence and the militarization of responses to violence, in front of the Ciudad Juárez Autonomous University Institute for Biomedical Sciences on 29 October 2010.<sup>1115</sup>

In another incident, on 12 December 2011, police fired live ammunition while dispersing around 300 or more student teachers blocking the motorway outside Chilpancingo. They were demanding better resources for rural education. The police killed two protesters and injured three others. One of the protesters was detained and tortured.<sup>1116</sup>

On 19 March 2010, military personnel killed two students as they left the campus at Monterrey Institute for Technology, planted firearms on their bodies and falsely claimed they were 'hit men'.<sup>1117</sup>

### ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

At least six teachers were killed in 2013 for reasons that were never established.<sup>1118</sup> For example, on 10 September in Acapulco, it was reported that teacher José Omar Ramírez Castro had been shot and killed less than 10 metres from his school as he went to give his class, sparking a strike by 144 teachers over insecurity and disrupting the education of over 10,000 students.<sup>1119</sup> Threats of kidnap and extortion against teachers also continued, with, for example, one school in the state of Morelos responding by moving teachers from one school to another to reduce the possible targeting of specific teachers.<sup>1120</sup> Police were alleged to have used excessive force and

illegally detained protesters when they used electric batons to disperse 300 teachers and students demonstrating against education reforms in Veracruz in September.<sup>1121</sup> In higher education, attacks against nanotechnology researchers persisted.<sup>1122</sup>

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