

Mexico arrests military officials over 2014 missing students case

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Images of the missing students from Ayotzinapa Teacher Training College at a march in Mexico City, August 26 [Henry Romero/Reuters]

Mexico City, September 16 (RHC)-- Mexican authorities have detained a retired army colonel and two other military officials for their alleged involvement in the 2014 disappearance of 43 students, a senior government official said, as families continue to search for answers and accountability.

Deputy Minister of Security Ricardo Mejia announced on Thursday that the government had issued arrest warrants for four military officials. Three have been taken into custody, including the former commander

of the army base in the southwestern city of Iguala where the students from Ayotzinapa Teacher Training College were abducted, Mejia said.

“At the moment, three of them have been carried out and there are three detainees, including the commander of the 27th infantry battalion at the time,” the deputy minister told reporters. Mejia did not identify those arrested by name, but the commander of the Iguala base at that time was Jose Rodriguez Perez.

Last month, a truth commission faulted military personnel for the disappearance of the students, who had been commandeering local buses to go to Mexico City to mark the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre.

Undersecretary of the Interior Alejandro Encinas, who led the commission, said in August that information corroborated with emergency telephone calls indicated that “six of the 43 disappeared students were held [for] several days” before allegedly being turned over to Perez. “Allegedly, the six students were alive for as many as four days after the events and were killed and disappeared on orders of the colonel, allegedly the then-Colonel Jose Rodriguez Perez.”

The 2014 disappearances spurred mass protests and international condemnation of the government of then-President Enrique Pena Nieto. The students’ loved ones have since continued to seek justice and answers as to what happened.

Authorities had said that the students were likely killed after being handed over to local drug gangs. Their remains were never found, but burned bone fragments have been matched to three students.

In 2019, the administration of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador reopened the probe into the disappearances. Since then, authorities have issued arrest warrants for several former officials, including Tomas Zeron, who was the head of the federal investigation agency at the time of the abductions and remains a fugitive in Israel.

Last month, federal prosecutors also arrested ex-Attorney General Jesus Murillo Karam on charges of forced disappearance, torture and obstruction of justice in relation to the case.

This week’s arrest of military officials comes after Mexico’s Senate passed legislation that would transfer control of the country’s National Guard over to the military in a move that sparked an outcry about the growing power of the army.

Lopez Obrador has dismissed concerns over the increased militarization of public security, saying the National Guard must now be under military command to prevent corruption.

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