

## Human Rights Watch Faults Mexico Over Disappearances

By RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD

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MEXICO CITY — Nearly 150 people and possibly hundreds more have disappeared at the hands of Mexico's police and military during the drug war with little or no investigation of the cases, a human rights group said Wednesday, as it called on the new government to account for the country's missing.

The organization, Human Rights Watch, said in a report that Mexico has "the most severe crisis of enforced disappearances in Latin America in decades." The group found a litany of cases in which witnesses reported people had been abducted or were last seen with the military or the police, never to be seen again.

Altogether the group documented 149 such cases in the past six years, after the previous president, Felipe Calderón, began his term with heavy deployments of military and federal police to combat exploding violence. The group's investigation found 60 cases in which witness testimony and other evidence demonstrated that local police officers had colluded with cartels in abductions.

"These are not isolated," José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch, said. "This is absolutely shocking."

Human Rights Watch said it had investigated an additional 100 disappearances but could not conclude that state security was responsible or involved.

Often, when family or friends asked the authorities, they were told their loved ones were not there or had not been taken.

In one of the more egregious episodes, the group documented more than 20 cases of abductions without explanation by Navy personnel in June and July 2011, some recorded on video by enraged family members. The Navy later acknowledged it had come into contact with several of the men but denied they were being held; all remain missing.

The Interior Ministry, which received the report Wednesday, declined to comment, but President Enrique Peña Nieto has said he would be more attentive to the victims of violence, who themselves are often divided over how Mexico should respond. The group urged the government to investigate the cases and establish documentation procedures. Documenting deaths and disappearances in the drug war has proved difficult, because police agencies, especially at the state level, are often weak or corrupt and thorough investigations are rare. In none of the 250 cases Human Rights Watch found have there been any convictions.

Mr. Calderón's government had compiled a list of 25,000 people reported missing in the past six years, but government officials and human rights groups have said it is incomplete and flawed. Among other problems, the list fails to distinguish how many were eventually found or how many people left by choice, though Human Rights Watch said it nevertheless suggests the scale of the problem of disappearances. An Interior Ministry official told reporters Wednesday that the list would soon be released, though a version of it had been leaked to news organizations and a human rights

group in December.

Tallying the dead at the hands of organized criminal groups has also been challenging, with inconsistent criteria to determine whether a homicide is related to the fight against and among organized crime and drug gangs. Nevertheless, Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, the interior secretary, recently told a radio program that 70,000 people died in the drug war in the past six years, while acknowledging the information was incomplete.

Mr. Calderón, constitutionally limited to one, six-year term, stepped down Dec. 1 and is now a fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government . His office did not respond to a request for comment.

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