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## 'Dirty war' reportedly still goes on in Guerrero

**Human-rights advocates decry abuses in Mexico**

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ATOYAC de ALVAREZ, Mexico - While Mexico debates charges against ex-President Luis Echeverria for the deaths of demonstrators 33 years ago, human-rights advocates and others say police are still waging a dirty war in Guerrero state, with little or no government effort to stop it.

Federal prosecutors in Guerrero deny there's any pattern to the police abuses, blaming them on corrupt and unethical officers. They say they're recruiting more honest men to fill the state's police ranks.

But human-rights officials cite a variety of cases to back their claim that abuses systematically aren't prosecuted. Amnesty International thinks there's a political component to the cases.

"Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the continuing harassment of leaders of peasant organizations," the agency wrote in its 2003 annual report, citing events in Guerrero.

### **Cases that advocates cite:**

- At least 20 judicial police commanders, chiefs and officers remain at large, even though they've been charged with homicide, rape, abduction and torture, according to Guerrero's Human Rights Commission.
- At least 11 people have disappeared, some after they were arrested, in the last two years, the commission says. From 1991 to 2001, the commission said, it asked state and federal officials to investigate 630 cases of suspected police abuse, but that only 70 of those cases have been resolved.
- At least 60 people are in jail, rights groups say, because of their politics. The jailed people include farmers, government opponents and suspected rebels.

Human rights advocates also note that top officials accused of being involved in the disappearances continue to hold state jobs, including the state's assistant attorney general, Antonio Nogueta Carvajal.

Nogueta was a police commander in neighboring Morelos state when he was accused in 1988 in the disappearance of Jose Ramon Garcia, a well-known leftist leader who vanished during allegations that the presidential election that put Carlos Salinas de Gortari in office was rigged.

Nogueta has repeatedly asserted his innocence and says the charges were dropped. Morelos state officials, contacted by Knight Ridder, said they could find no paperwork on the case.

But Daniel Estrella, the special prosecutor who handled the case, said the warrant against Nogueta is still valid and that three others named with Nogueta are serving time for the case. In June, Guerrero opposition parties, state legislators and rights organizations asked the federal and state government to reopen the investigation.

Estrella blames the lack of prosecution on Nogueta's membership in the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which held the Mexican presidency for 71 years before the 2000 election of National Action Party candidate Vicente Fox and still holds the Guerrero statehouse.

## **"Players protect each other"**

"It's been 12 years," Estrella said. "In Mexico, old political players protect each other. Noguera is old PRI. There're a lot of Nogueras."

Noguera told reporters in June that he had been cleared. "I was the subject of that investigation but had nothing to do with Garcia's disappearance," he said.

Guerrero has long been a center of political violence in Mexico. It's the home state of legendary guerrilla leader Lucio Cabanas, whose Guerrilla Army of the Poor terrorized government supporters in the 1970s and who was killed in a shootout with the Mexican army near this town in 1974. Many people here still revere him.

Of the 535 cases of disappeared people from the 1960s and 1970s chronicled by the Mexican Human Rights Commission, two-thirds took place in Guerrero, many in the mountains near here, according to Ignacio Carrillo, the special prosecutor Fox appointed as head of the Office for Political and Social Movements of the Past, charged with investigating the so-called dirty war of three decades ago.

Fearful people in Atoyac de Alvarez, where Carrillo established an office to look into old allegations, rail about brutal police, military and government officials who terrorize this Pacific Coast state, best known for its resort city of Acapulco.

"There're still kidnappings and torture, and no one is ever punished," said Tita Radilla, the vice president of the Association for Families of Disappeared Victims.

"We denounce it, file legal complaints, but authorities here just move perpetrators to other towns."

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