

Editorial

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PEOPLE is a global scourge that in Mexico gained strength as a mechanism of political repression starting in 1960. One of the characteristics of the so-called “dirty war” was the persecution, torture, and disappearance of a large number of people, as a systematic practice against people opposed to the regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that remained in power for more than 70 years.

Considered a multi-offensive violation of human rights, this ominous practice reemerged on the government of the National Action Party (PAN), with Vicente Fox as president, and alarmingly worsened after the “war against drug trafficking” declared by Felipe Calderón Hinojosa in 2007, when the confrontations involving the army, the federal police and criminal groups broke out, for control of the territory, of the routes for transfer to the United States of America and in general, to maintain the predominance and control of other criminal activities in different regions of the country such as the Gulf of Mexico, the Pacific, the Center and the border areas.

To settle their conflicts, instill fear or delimit their territory, criminal groups carried out violent acts against their rivals such as execution, mutilation and torture. As was demonstrated in the trial against Genaro García Luna, the government was corrupted, it collaborated with criminal organizations and took sides in a war that was not against drug trafficking; collusion between criminal groups and the authorities of the three different orders of government to traffic drugs, murder and disappear people was evidenced, as well as to cover up or block actions to search and deliver justice.

If the fact of being imprisoned and that their families were condemned to the uncertainty of not knowing their whereabouts had been insufficient, during this period, the authorities argued that the victims of homicide or disappearance were related to organized crime. Subsequently, the facts revealed that people disappeared for different reasons: for being activists in search of their relatives, for being journalists that made local governments uncomfortable; women were also disappeared to be subjected to sexual exploitation, agricultural laborers, girls and boys to dedicate them to cultivating, collecting, processing and transferring narcotics.

Given the seriousness of the situation, on October 12, 2017, the Chamber of Deputies approved the General Law on Forced Disappearance of Persons, Disap-

pearance Committed by Individuals, and the Person Search System. This law entered into force in January 2018, and, in section IV of its article 2, the creation of the National Search Commission (CNB) was established, as well as local search commissions in the federal entities. The first commissioner, Roberto Cabrera Alfaro, was in charge of the CNB, from March 7, 2018, to January 17, 2019, without major results. It was not until February 8, 2019, that the president of the republic, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, appointed Karla Quintana Osuna as the new National Commissioner for the Search for Disappeared Persons in Mexico.

In March 2019, the federal government, through the CNB, recognized the forensic emergency due to the existence of tens of thousands of unidentified bodies. According to figures from the report presented by the undersecretary for Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, between 2006 and 2017, 37,443 corpses were processed, without evidence of having performed the necropsy or the identification protocol; in many cases with procedures so irregular that they caused the loss of the “traceability” of the bodies that were buried in common graves, which made it impossible to corroborate their identity.

This forensic emergency is of enormous dimensions, it materializes in at least 52,000 unidentified bodies in the hands of prosecutors, in hundreds of thousands of highly degraded bone fragments and in thousands of discovery sites of clandestine burial graves. It will be impossible to resolve without the collaboration of other social groups, such as family groups and universities. Not only to search for missing persons, but to build the human infrastructure and have a greater number of searchers and forensic specialists.

In order to record UNAM’s willingness to contribute to addressing this problem and illustrate the actions of the CNB authorities, it is important to highlight the following fact: on October 25, 2019, commissioner Karla Quintana Osuna attended to the Institute of Anthropological Research of the UNAM to request the collaboration of academics from various specialties. She commented that the problem of missing persons, due to its complexity, entails great difficulties. She also indicated that the Commission under his charge has a large number of powers and that, at that time, it only had 43 people on its staff, which is why it required the collaboration of multiple instances and disciplines for the search, location, and identification of people across the country. She expressed that the most acute problems are located in the states of Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, Guerrero, Veracruz, Coahuila and Michoacán, among others.

The acting director of the Institute for Anthropological Research, Dr. Rafael Pérez-Taylor, expressed his greatest willingness to collaborate in the search and identification, in the training of personnel, as well as in the elaboration of protocols for the recovery, individualization and identification of people, since the Institute has specialists in different fields, laboratories and state-of-the-art tech-

nology. Dr. Quintana expressed her enthusiasm and interest and proposed to sign, as soon as possible, a bilateral agreement to define the scope of the collaboration and requirements of the Institute.

As of that date, a series of meetings were held to define the search needs of the CNB, so that, through an interinstitutional strategy, Conacyt financed the research process and field work.

It was agreed to work, in principle, in three areas: the creation of a genetic map, made up of 10,000 samples from people in six regions of the Mexican republic; the search for people in submerged contexts and the progression of images of 2,000 missing children in the country. During 2020, however, due to the pandemic, six of the most specialized researchers in the country prepared the projects and entered them into the Conacyt platform, under the name “Interdisciplinary, Scientific and Technological Project for the Search for Missing Persons in Mexico”, Request 000000001499. However, there was no response, the CNB officials disappeared for the UNAM, despite the commitment, the efforts of the academic staff and the investment of Conacyt and the University for these projects.

The current government reports a series of advances such as the exchange of information from various databases, institutional agreements, alliances, genetic databases from different instances (which, however, are incompatible), strengthening the legal framework for the search for people, records, modules and the creation of the National Center for Human Identification, among other actions. Although they are important and contribute in some way, after almost five years of this government, given the dimension of this collective national tragedy and the pain of many families, these actions can be considered irrelevant, considering that thousands of people continue missing, without identifying and that others continue to disappear for the same reasons.

The problem of the disappearance of people is complex, multivariable and multicausal, among many others, the following causes can be identified:

- The development model that was imposed on our country for more than 30 years, which generated poverty, inequality and a lack of opportunities for the new generations, by virtue of the fact that the government delegated to the market the social rights of health, education, work, housing and food, among others.
- Corruption and collusion between local and organized crime with the authorities of the three levels of government, the prosecutor's offices and the judicial system. Although there are always exceptions, they are insignificant to counteract the problem of insecurity, injustice and impunity.

- The lack of capacity of the responsible authorities to organize and work collectively in an interinstitutional manner, between entities, dependencies, state and municipal governments, as well as with universities and groups of relatives of victims, among many other actions.

Therefore, corruption, indolence, inefficiency or the lack of capacity from the authorities of the three orders of government, led to the groups of relatives undertaking the search through their own means, to locate findings and clandestine burials in rivers, mangroves, caves and public or private properties, sometimes accompanied by volunteers and non-governmental organizations, and other times by the authorities. In most cases, it is the family members who have directly collected human remains, clothing and other objects; the cases do not go to court frequently, the processes remain in the investigation stage, which is interrupted or becomes obsolete due to being plagued with violations of due process, unauthorized persons intervening, they become contaminated, altered and lose evidence.

Consequently, great challenges continue to exist for the federal, jurisdictional, and law enforcement authorities; to have specialized personnel with technical-scientific instruments and to have an infrastructure that makes it possible to locate, individualize and identify disappeared persons in different contexts.

Even if it seems naive or unrealistic, one of the objectives of this publication is to call on the authorities to put the common interest and the pain of the victims before their political differences or interests of any kind. To society, so that it does not become indifferent, keeping in mind that the tragedy continues and that at any moment, life can place us on the side of the victims or their families.

About the interview

These arguments are illustrated in the interview with Dr. Rosalía Castro Toss, co-founder of the Solecito Collective, made up mostly of women, who since 2014, search for and locate human remains in clandestine graves, of crimes committed by organized crime and even by the rulers who have been corrupted and associated with the local mafias.

It was an unusual interview, due to the context of insecurity and threats against women search groups in Mexico and because of the interviewee's profile. I was fortunate to have the support of the anthropologist María Freier, who collaborated with the methodology and recommendations (because of the value it brings to this type of interview, it is attached in its entirety).

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Emma Chávez for her theoretical and legal support in matters of rights related to the disappearance of persons, in the style revision* of the articles, as well as in the edition of the interview with Doctor Rosalía Castro Toss.

Eligio Cruz Leandro
Guest Editor

* The journal **INTER DISCIPLINA** also carries out a process of editing care that includes the stylistic correction of all the material that requires it. (Editor's note).