



## The Tragedies of Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico

Hundreds of young women in Mexican border towns have been the victims of abduction, rape, and murder in a horrific epidemic that began over a decade ago. The Mexican government estimates that over a thousand women have disappeared from Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico since 1993. The exact cause of these violent femicides remains unsolved yet still continues today.

Despite the gruesome nature of these crimes, authorities at all levels of the Mexican government exhibit indifference, and there is strong evidence that some officials may be involved. Impunity and corruption have permitted the criminals, to continue committing these acts, knowing there will be no consequences.

A significant number of victims work in maquiladoras – sweatshops that produce exports, 90% of which are destined for the United States. The maquiladoras employ mainly young women at poverty level wages. In combination with lax environmental regulations and low tariffs under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the maquiladoras are amassing tremendous wealth. Yet despite the crime wave, they offer almost no protection for their workers. High profile government campaigns such as Ponte Vista (Be Aware), a self defense program, and supplying women with whistles have been ineffective and are carried out mainly for public relations purposes.

Small advances in the struggle for justice are due to the perseverance of victims' families who cannot be silenced despite the efforts of state and federal authorities to keep them quiet. Campaigns by local, national and international non-governmental organizations are also important. Often grassroots groups work in a climate of threats and defamation by government officials.

The crimes are ongoing and unsolved. To lend our support to women in two of the most affected communities, Spark has held a forum and will hold a

fundraiser for three groups intimately involved in this issue:

- Centro de Estudios y Taller Laboral (CETLAC): An organization providing training and information to Juarez residents, especially young women who work in maquiladoras, concerning labor problems such as discrimination, occupational health and safety, and legal rights.
- Casa Amiga Centro Crisis: An organization offering psychological, legal and medical assistance to women and their families who have suffered from the violence.
- Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas: A Chihuahua city-based organization of mothers, lawyers and friends demanding justice for the disappeared and murdered young women in Chihuahua City and Juarez. This organization consists of approximately twenty families. Justicia has sent mothers across the world to testify about their experiences, and assists with recently abducted women by making photocopies of the missing and posting them in public places.

In addition to financial support, Spark will engage in this issue on a policy level, working to pressure officials, organizations, and companies that are in a position to make a difference for the young women being targeted in these communities.



### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Make a donation through Spark to the families of the women who have disappeared.
- Sign on to an on-line petition in support of the families: [www.PetitionOnline.com/JUAREZ/](http://www.PetitionOnline.com/JUAREZ/)
- Join Mexico Solidarity Network's campaign: <http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/Juarez%20and%20Chihuahua/>
- Purchase a report detailing the tragedies: <http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/Special%20Reports/>

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