



Press Release

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Mexico Must Summon Political Will to Fully Implement Law on Forced Disappearances

On International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, Mexico Government Must Take Responsibility for Disappearances Crisis

Washington, DC—Yesterday, Mexico President Enrique Peña Nieto [released a video](#) defending the government’s original investigation into [the attack and forced disappearance of 43 students](#) at the hands of security forces and criminal organizations in 2014. That investigation has been widely discredited by international organizations and experts, and was also deemed fatally flawed in [a Mexican federal court ruling](#) earlier this year. In a country where at least 37,000 people have disappeared since 2007, Peña Nieto’s recent comments—alongside the apparent lack of political will to implement [a historic 2017 law on forced disappearances](#)—are representative of his government’s broader failure to guarantee truth and justice to victims and families of the disappeared, according to research and advocacy group the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).

“It’s all too clear that one of the biggest legacies of the Peña Nieto administration will be its shameful failure to provide answers to the tens of thousands of families tirelessly searching for their missing loved ones,” said WOLA Assistant Director for Mexico [Ximena Suárez-Enríquez](#).

While Peña Nieto signed the General Law on Disappearances in November 2017, it is clear that its implementation has not been a priority for his administration. One of the most important aspects of the law was the creation of a National Search Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda*), tasked with leading search efforts for missing persons. However, with reportedly only 20 employees working in poorly equipped offices, the Commission remains understaffed and underfunded. Victims, families of the disappeared, and the human rights groups accompanying them have pointed to the Commission’s failure to develop a

concrete plan to coordinate search efforts with state-level authorities, leaving it up to families to search for their missing loved ones.

“The government is supposed to take the lead in searching for the disappeared, instead of forcing that responsibility onto families,” said Suarez. **“If the National Search Commission lacks an effective strategy to lead nationwide searches for the disappeared, then all we have here is a law that looks good on paper but actually changes very little.”**

Another major challenge involving the law’s full implementation is the number of forensic experts needed to identify the human remains being uncovered in mass graves across the country. This is arguably a key area where Mexico must demonstrate political will, including by welcoming international assistance and oversight when necessary: [as stated recently](#) by the UN Human Rights Office in Mexico, the country would do well to “deepen its openness to international scrutiny and assistance” as part of its efforts to combat the disappearances crisis.

“It’s time to prioritize doing what’s necessary to finally bring justice to the tens of thousands of disappeared victims and their families,” said Suarez. **“Mexico’s government must take bold steps to ensure that the 2017 law on disappearances is swiftly and fully implemented, and that includes proactively seeking out technical assistance and allowing for international oversight.”**