

latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-fg-mexico-ruling11-2009dec11,0,7865590.story

**latimes.com**

## **Court cites rights failure by Mexico in Juarez killings of women**

**The inter-American tribunal finds that Mexican officials failed to properly investigate the deaths of three women in a case stemming from slayings of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juarez.**

By Ken Ellingwood

December 11, 2009

Reporting from Mexico City

Mexico violated human rights conventions by failing to properly investigate the killings of three young women in 2001 during a now-infamous wave of slayings in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, an international tribunal decided in a ruling released Thursday.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered the Mexican government to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages to the families of the three victims and directed authorities to take other steps aimed at acknowledging their failings and finding the killers.

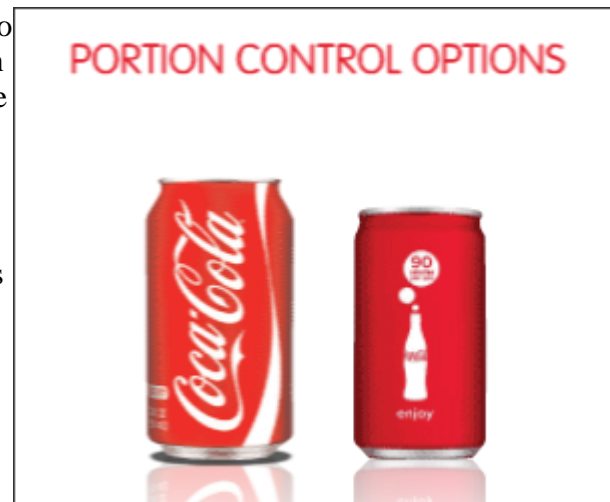
The court ordered Mexico to erect a monument commemorating the hundreds of women slain in Ciudad Juarez since 1993 and said authorities should revise training and investigative guidelines to improve handling of cases involving slain or missing women.

The binding decision marks the first time an international tribunal has judged Mexico for its handling of the killings of women in Ciudad Juarez. It largely validates charges by numerous groups over the years that authorities in the state of Chihuahua bungled the investigations or never bothered to probe deeply.

More than 350 women and girls were slain in Ciudad Juarez -- with many of the bodies bearing signs of rape and mutilation -- over more than a decade, a situation that drew widespread international condemnation. Most of the killings have not been solved.

Activists said that the 156-page decision strikes a blow for justice in a circumstance in which many of the dead were impoverished young factory workers.

"It represents hope for thousands of people, of mothers, of desperate family members with nowhere to turn for help, no one to bring them justice," said Irma Guadalupe Casas, director of Casa Amiga, a



Ciudad Juarez group that works with victims' families.

Lawyers for the families of the three victims in the case, who were 15 to 20 years old, said the court-ordered remedies could help improve Mexico's widely mistrusted judiciary.

"If Mexico complies in a timely fashion with all these measures in good faith, it will be a huge improvement for the rule of law, especially in Ciudad Juarez," said Ariel Dulitzky, director of the Human Rights Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law. He has given legal advice to the mothers of the victims.

Mexico promised to comply with the ruling, which is not subject to appeal. It said many of the measures ordered by the court are already in place in Chihuahua.

"The government of Mexico reiterates its firm commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, in particular to combating violence against women and girls," the Interior Ministry said.

President Felipe Calderon named Arturo Chavez, who was state prosecutor in Chihuahua during the late 1990s, as the Mexican attorney general this year, despite protests by critics who accused him of botching the murder cases.

International outcry over the killings eventually prompted the federal government to name a special prosecutor in Ciudad Juarez. State authorities built a high-tech forensics laboratory and announced plans to improve the handling of women's cases.

But few of the slayings have been solved, and young women continue to go missing. In August, The Times reported on disappearances of two dozen teenage girls and young women in Ciudad Juarez since the beginning of 2008. Most were local residents and in stable middle-class and working-class homes.

Activists have long asserted that the killings of the women amounted to rights violations. Family members said authorities failed to take the cases seriously and even appeared to steer blame toward the victims.

Helped by advocacy groups and outside lawyers, the families of Claudia Ivette Gonzalez, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal and Laura Berenice Ramos Monarrez in 2002 took the matter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, based in Washington.

The human rights court, based in San Jose, Costa Rica, heard the case in April.

Mexico was ordered to pay more than \$200,000 to each of the three families.

[ken.ellingwood@latimes.com](mailto:ken.ellingwood@latimes.com)

Cecilia Sanchez of The Times' Mexico City Bureau contributed to this report.

Copyright © 2009, [The Los Angeles Times](#)