

Failure to respond to crime reports: the case of Lilia Alejandra García

At 10.15pm on 19 February 2001, people living near waste ground close to a *maquila* in Ciudad Juárez dialed 060, the municipal police emergency number, to inform them that an apparently naked young woman was being beaten and raped by two men in a car. No patrol car was dispatched in response to the first call. Following a second call, a police unit was sent out but did not arrive until 11.25pm, too late to intervene. The car had already left.

Four days earlier, the mother of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade had reported her 17-year-old daughter missing to the *Unidad de Atención a Víctimas de Delitos Sexuales y Contra la Familia*, Unit for the Care of Victims of Sexual Offences and Offences against the Family. Lilia Alejandra, the mother of a baby and a three-year-old boy, worked in a *maquiladora* called *Servicios Plásticos y Ensamblés*. At 7.30pm on the previous night, her colleagues had seen her walking towards an unlit area of waste ground next to the factory. Lilia Alejandra used to cross it every day to catch the bus home. But that night she never reached her destination.

On 21 February the body of a young woman was found on the waste ground near to where the emergency call had been made. It was wrapped in a blanket and showed signs of physical and sexual assault. The cause of death was found to be asphyxia resulting from strangulation. The body of the young woman was identified by the parents as being that of Lilia Alejandra. The forensic report concluded that she had died a day and a half earlier and that she had spent at least five days in captivity prior to her death. A report from the police switchboard taken at 11.05pm on 19 February simply states "nothing to report" ("*reporte sin novedad*"). The identity of the woman attacked that day was never established and no attempt was made to investigate whether there was any connection between that incident and the abduction of Lilia Alejandra or any other case. The authorities never investigated the lack of response on the part of the 060 Emergency Switchboard in Ciudad Juárez. There is still no lighting on the waste ground next to the *maquiladora*. A small cross commemorates the place where the body was found.

Despite the fact that crimes of this kind had been happening in Ciudad Juárez for eight years, the authorities had been unable to establish effective emergency response systems, which is particularly worrying in cases where an apparent abduction and rape have been reported. Worse still, the state authorities failed to review the mistakes made in this case and denied that there was any connection between the emergency call and the abduction and murder of Lilia. No disciplinary action has been reported.



Mother and daughter of Lilia Alejandra © AI

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you wish to campaign on behalf of *Lilia Alejandra García*:

Write to the Mexican authorities and the Mexican Embassy in your country highlighting the following points:

expressing your deep concern at the fact that the state authorities did not respond effectively to the report that Lilia Alejandra was missing, denied any connection between the emergency call and the abduction and murder of Lilia Alejandra, did not launch disciplinary measures or take into account the mistakes made, and did not carry out a thorough and effective investigation so that those responsible could be brought to justice;

requesting the authorities to carry out an immediate review of its emergency response systems and to introduce effective measures for locating people who are reported missing, including installing telephones in marginalised communities which work 24 hours a day. Effective procedures must be established to locate women who have been abducted, such as, the carrying out of immediate searches with the help of relatives. Such searches must continue until the victim is found. The search must be supervised by a judge who must be able to count on the immediate collaboration of other judges, prosecutors and the police;

requesting the authorities to investigate the alleged negligence, tolerance, failure to act and complicity on the part of state officials in investigating the abduction and murder of the women in question. Such acts must be viewed as serious abuses of authority and those responsible must be brought to justice. Any official under investigation must be immediately suspended;

requesting the state to acknowledge its responsibility for the negligence shown in the investigation of the abduction and murder of Lilia Alejandra and its duty to provide reparations to the family, as well as to recognize the legitimate work being done by non-governmental organizations in their struggle for justice.

Publicize this case in the local and national media of your country.

Distribute details of this case to individuals or groups whom you think may be interested.

Appeals to:

President of Mexico:

Lic. Vicente Fox Quesada, Presidente de los Estados Unidos de México, Residencia Oficial de «Los Pinos», Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, México D.F., C.P. 11850, México. Fax:+ 52 5 2 77 23 76 Salutation: Dear President

Governor of Chihuahua State: Lic. Patricio Martínez, Gobernador del Estado de Chihuahua Aldama 901, Colonia Centro, Estado de Chihuahua, México. Fax:+ 52 614 429 3464, Salutation: Dear Governor

Chihuahua State Public Prosecutor: Lic. Jesús José Solís, Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Chihuahua. Calle Vicente Guerrero 616, Col. Centro, Estado de Chihuahua, México. Fax:+ 52 614 415 0314 Salutation: Dear Sir

Copy to: Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights:

Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C. (CMDPDH)
Tehuantepec 155, Col. Roma Sur, México DF, CP 5584 2731, México. E-mail: cmdpdh@laneta.apc.org

Bring Our Daughters Home: Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casam Calle 5 de Mayo, No. 859, Norte o No. 321, a 2 calles del Malecón, Colonia Hidalgo/Partido Romero, Ciudad Juárez, Estado de Chihuahua, México