

## **Thirty Years Later This NGO Is Still Fighting For Women's Rights in Mexico**

Women in Mexico have been fighting for rights on the same timeline as many women around the world. Femicide, though, is an increasing problem that Mexico's own president downplays. The increase in murders based on sex is leading to multiple strikes and protests. Hundreds of women are fighting not only for their right to equal pay but the right to walk outside without fear of being killed simply for being a woman. One NGO has been part of the fight for the last thirty years and their support for women's rights in Mexico continues to expand with the rise in femicide.

### **Femicide Increases 10% In A Single Year Every**

Every twenty-four hours ten women are killed in Mexico. These crimes are often brutal, vicious, and solely based on gender. They are committed by family members, strangers, and husbands or boyfriends. From 2018 there was a 10% jump in femicide murders, a term now used by women of Mexico to ensure the focus is on the fact that they are being murdered simply for being women. In total over 4,000 women have been killed in Mexico in the last four years. Within the first four months of 2020 over 900 women and girls have been murdered.

One of the factors considered in this horrific pattern is said to be 'Machoism' and the culture's perception of what makes a man manly. Mexico's widely accepted outline of 'manliness' is boosted by the president's response to both the numbers and the protests. He stated earlier this year in an interview that "Ninety percent of those calls that serve as your base are false, it's proven," Femicide claimed the lives of 3,825 women last year. When a political leader does not take the issue seriously people follow their lead. Fear is becoming a societal norm for women. When they leave their house they are putting their life on the line.

### **Indigenous Women Are In The Most Danger**

Mexican- indigenous populations span over the poorest states. Women's rights in Mexico, especially in the rural areas, are far behind compared to other places in Latin America. The aforementioned 'Machoism' trickles down to indigenous populations but the women in these communities are left without outside help. They do not work or speak to anyone outside the community. Ciudad Juarez, a state populated with Indigenous people, has the highest femicide rates in the poorer areas and third compared to all the states in Mexico. The national average of femicide is 1.25 per 100,000 women, Ciudad Juarez sits at 1.65 per 100,000 women.

### **Protests Persist Throughout 2020**

Protests began in March of this year in an attempt to highlight that ten women a day get murdered. Over 150,000 women went on strike in objection to the lack of women's rights in Mexico and rampant femicide. Streets were void of women as were classrooms, workspaces, and public transit. Jobs run mostly by women were forced to shut down including some schools. Not only were they fighting against gender-motivated crimes they showed the country what it

would be like without them. The economy would tank an estimated \$1.37 billion in a single day if every woman in Mexico took part in the protest.

The following Sunday women reversed their plan of action and flooded the streets armed with signs and songs about female empowerment. Across many cities in Mexico, women used their voices to pull attention to the dangers they face simply for existing as a woman.

Protests continued throughout the year leading up to the takeover of Mexico's human rights commission headquarters. Women stormed the building a week before Mexico's independence day and turned the 19th-century building into battered women and children shelter. Taking over the headquarters is both an act of rebellion and vivid symbolism reflecting the country's lack of response to spousal abuse. The lack of women's rights in Mexico leaves nothing for women suffering at the hands of their husbands.

Occupiers give speeches to onlookers about their experience with the CNDH and the lack of response. Sisters, mothers, and daughters disappear without a trace and are ignored by the police. They're named runaways or are dismissed as just being 'gone'.

## **Run By Women For Women An NGO Makes A Difference**

In the late 70s, early 80s women's funds began to emerge to combat the low percentage, less than five, of philanthropic investment into causes for women. Fondo Semillas began in 1990 kick-started with funds from Global Fund for Women and became the first women's fund in the global south. There are now around ten organizations around Central America. Fondo Semillas is funded mostly by donors from outside of Mexico.

The NGO umbrellas a multitude of women's rights in Mexico in order to help every woman attain both safety and equality. They support groups of women often ostracized, forgotten, and abused by Mexico including indigenous women, Afro-Mexican women, lesbian women, and trans women. Fondo Semillas funds organizations and groups aiming to help women in multiple facets of life. They have now helped 773,000 women over the course of thirty years with a trickle down effect of over 2.7 million men and children benefiting from the results. .

Women's rights in Mexico are notoriously lacking in the poorest of states like Oaxaca and Chiapas. Fondo Semillas focuses much of their program funding on women in those areas as they are the most at risk and have a high indigenous population. Organizations seeking funding apply and are screened thoroughly. Currently, Fondo Semillas is funding 150 programs that lasts around 18 months. These programs focus on education, jobs, counseling, financial aid, legal aid, safety, and proper healthcare.

Work concentrated programs target changing women's pay gap compared to men in their field and assuring their labor rights are appropriate. Other areas of focus are work-family life balance, participating in labor unions, and economic autonomy. Women involved in health related

programs are taught proper sex education, given information about having healthy birth, and their reproductive rights are fought for. These programs also provide therapy for women that have been trafficked or victims of a sexually based assault.

Femicide and women's rights in Mexico are a fight that is going to continue throughout the next few years. Supporting programs that aid women are an important weapon to ensure those who don't have the option to use their voice are given a chance at a happy, healthy life. Fondo Semillas leads the way for other organizations to help thousands of women and their families. Femicide can be handled but it will take the voice of many to fight for the thousands of women who had their voices stolen.

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