

# *Mexican authorities discover 163 mass graves, 696 bodies in 18 months*

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Mexico City, September 10 (RHC)-- Over the past 18 months, 696 bodies have been recovered from 163 clandestine mass graves in Mexico, according to a new report by the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH).

Findings reported by media nationwide add up to "at least 163 graves between January 1, 2017 and August 30, 2018, with at least 530 bodies recovered, out of which 54 have been identified and at least 476 remain unidentified."

The CNDH figure doesn't include the most recent discovery: a mass grave containing 166 bodies in central Veracruz. Authorities said they have been working on it for a month, but its discovery wasn't made public until August 6th.

"The finding of mass graves challenges and questions the ability and resources of the Mexican state to respond to a situation that, over time, has become an obstacle that we have not been able to overcome," the CNDH continued.

Veracruz, on the east coast, has more mass graves than any other state in Mexico: a total of 38. Chihuahua, on the northern border, follows with 22. The CNDH said mass graves are the result of widespread impunity: investigations lack depth and suspects are rarely identified and convicted. Ultimately, many relatives of the missing must search for their loved ones alone.

Colectivo Solecito is an organization comprised of mothers looking for their missing children in Veracruz to fill the gap left by the absence of any formal government assistance.

Angeles Diaz Henao, founder and president, said state authorities have proven incompetent in exhuming and identifying the remains: "It's obvious they couldn't have been exhumed in an anthropologically correct way. They did a terrible job and we can see that."

Diaz Henao also criticized State Attorney Jorge Winckler, who has described the process as "a success": "It's a phrase that only someone insane could say: finding bodies being a success, when it's actually a giant failure of the Mexican government," she said.

The CNDH reported that between January 2007 and September 2016 at least 855 mass graves were found in Mexico, containing a total of 1,548 bodies. Media have offered alternative figures, reporting the discovery of 1,143 mass graves and 3,230 bodies.

In Colinas de Santa Fe, near the capital Veracruz, the biggest mass grave in Latin America was found in 2016: 295 bodies. Only 15 bodies have been positively identified so far.

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