

## MENOS DÍAS AQUÍ

Proyecto colectivo. Contamos muertes por violencia en México. Mantenemos viva la memoria de nuestros muertos. Reclamamos paz.

Desde el 12/sep/2010 hemos contado  
24,381 muertes por violencia en México

"Un día los muertos de la llamada guerra del narco tráfico serán verdad" (Diego Osorno)

REALIZAMOS EL CONTEO NACIONAL DE MUERTOS POR LA VIOLENCIA EN MÉXICO CON INFORMACIÓN RECARADA EN MEDIOS DE INFORMACIÓN DE TODO EL PAÍS. NUESTRA FUNCIÓN NO ES SEÑALAR CULPABLES, SINO GUARDAR MEMORIA DE TODOS NUESTROS MUERTOS. CON RESPETO.

SÍGUELO EN TWITTER.

Contador de muertes

DOMINGO, 13 DE MAYO DE 2012

### Guerrero

GRO 10/Mayo/12 **Asesinan a comerciante** de productos naturistas en Amacuzac; fue calcinado dentro de su camioneta Nissan Estaquitas color blanca con placas HC-087171 del Estado de Guerrero en la carretera puente de Ixtla-Iguala

GRO 12/Mayo/12 **Asesinan a Edgar Adán Romero López** en enfrentamiento entre los poblados de El Tibor y Arroyo Grande en el municipio La Unión, Guerrero.

### Morelos

MOR 12/Mayo/12 **Asesinan a hombre** de 30 años compleción robusta, al parecer asfixiado; en calle Orquídeas esquina con Las Flores en Cuernavaca, Morelos.

MOR 13/Mayo/12 **Asesinan al reportero René Orta Salgado** dentro de una Nissan Morano con placas 222 UVK del Distrito Federal. Fue encontrado sobre calzada del Hueso, colonia Bellavista en Cuernavaca, Morelos.

### Guanajuato

Si muere por violencia un familiar, un amigo, un vecino, un compañero o un conocido y no aparece en nuestro conteo, agradeceremos que dejen una nota para que lo sumemos. Es un momento doloroso, lo sabemos. Nosotros también hemos tenido que hacerlo. Pero creemos que las víctimas tienen derecho a estar aquí y los invitamos a recordarlas.

Menos Días Aquí es un proyecto de Nuestra Aparente Rendición. \* ESTE ES UN PROYECTO HECHO POR VOLUNTARIOS Y EL MODO DE NOMBRAR Y RECORDAR A LOS MUERTOS POR LA VIOLENCIA EN MÉXICO DEPENDE DE CADA UNO DE ELLOS. AUNQUE HAY VOLUNTAD DE RESPETO, NOSTALGIA Y ESPERANZA EN NUESTRA POSIBILIDAD DE HACER ALGO AL

Screen capture: [Menos Días Aquí](#), Nuestra aparente Rendición

## Menos Días Aquí: Civilian Casualties, the Archive, and Naming Violent Murders in Mexico

Alejandro Velez | Nuestra Aparente Rendición



Forensic anthropologist explaining her job at the ICMP forensic laboratory

Photo: Alejandro Velez

# EMISFÉRICA

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The woman, a forensic anthropologist, took out several bones from a bag, she placed them on the table as if they were Legos or wood pieces and finally started to assemble the skeleton in front of our wide-open eyes. The bones that formed the skeleton were nearly complete; it was missing only the bones of a hand, some ribs, and the most important part of all: the skull. Some of the friends with whom I had visited the headquarters of the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP) in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina were trying so hard not to cry that even their features were hardened towards the awkward presence of death. An American friend could not bear it, got dizzy, and left the room crying. After explaining to us the probable cause of death of this individual—now just reduced to a bag of bones—the forensic anthropologist tried to explain to us the alchemy of the procedure for DNA identification, so that we could understand the importance of her job in the context of the wars in the Balkans.

“Aren’t you emotionally affected by what you do?” I asked her, so as to break the uncomfortable monologue taking place. “Not at all, it is my job and I have been doing it for years,” she answered with a smile. Seconds later, she clarified her answer: “However, I must confess that I could not perform the jobs that other ICMP sections do; for example, the people that have to make phone calls to inform we have found the remains of a relative. I could never do that job.”

On August 23, 2010, just a couple of days after my emotive trip to Bosnia, Mexican newspapers carried the news of the discovery of 72 corpses in the proximities of San Fernando in Tamaulipas, Mexico. All of the bodies seemed to be those of migrants, and they had all been shot from behind. I remembered the images of the communal graves that I found from Nezuk to Srebrenica while walking the Peace March as well as all the stories that I heard about men hunting men. The news from Mexico related that the migrants had refused to work for the Zetas cartel and as a consequence they were brutally executed. There is no trustworthy version of the event—and maybe there will never be—but there was a solid and sympathetic response made by several journalists, poets, novelists, photographers, editors, musicians, and researchers. They reacted to the enormity of the event by joining their efforts, creativity, and commitment to create the website [72migrantes.com](http://72migrantes.com). The website is a virtual altar dedicated to commemorating the life of each migrant, whether officially identified or not. The project, conceived by the journalist Alma Guillermoprieto, was meant to fill with words and meaning the life of those persons that lost everything—even their name—in their quest for a better life.

At the newly-launched and budding platform [Nuestra Aparente Rendición](#) we were inspired by the success of “72migrantes” and decided to create “[Menos Días Aquí](#),” which we envisioned as a civic project that would not only count the victims of the violence in Mexico but also name and remember each of them. The project was born on September 12, 2010 with the following rules proposed by Jorge Harmodio, one of its creators and the first volunteer who

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counted the victims of violence:

1. Count all deaths related to violence in Mexico, not just as a number but also as a narrative.
- 2.
3. Count human beings. Start with factual data (number of murdered people, date, place, names of the victims, cause of death) in order to portray their lives (photographs, hobbies, hints of their life).
- 4.
5. Do not impose a moral frame; do not take sides; do not make moral or political distinctions between sides. Concentrate on that “something” which victims and murderers share, whether war criminals or simple bystanders: the human condition.

The nearest analog to “Menos Días Aquí” is a project from El Salvador called [“100 Días en la República de la Muerte.”](#) It was devised by a group of artists in 2004 in order to counteract the violence in the Central American country. The project consisted in counting the number of violent deaths over the course of 100 consecutive days and then uploading the information to a blog. Another similar project is the [“Iraq Body Count \(IBC\),](#) which has counted civilian deaths related to the American occupation since 2003. These days, the IBC is considered the most reliable source for getting information on civilian casualties in Iraq.



Unidentified remains of a victim of the war in the Balkans.

Photo: Alejandro Velez

As can be seen in the goals of each of these projects, the work of counting the victims in a war or in an internal conflict is an extremely important mission, both mathematically and symbolically. Unfortunately, in Mexico during the first years of the Calderón Administration, this task was overlooked. We did not know how many people had been killed and under what circumstances. It was not until 2011 that the government created—and later abandoned—a database called [“Base de datos de fallecimientos ocurridos por presunta rivalidad delincuencia!”](#) (Database of Deaths Related to Presumed Delinquent

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Rivarly). Meanwhile, almost every national newspaper started to count the murders related to the War on Drugs. It was in this context of uncertainty that we started counting and naming at “Menos Días Aquí.”

After 85 weeks we have counted, tweeted, and narrated 24,404 violent murders in Mexico. Even though it might seem that the horrifying death toll is the most significant feature of the project, we consider that the effort to describe the context in which each person died as well as the effort to rescue some details of their humanity—the clothes he/she was wearing, his/her profession, the place he/she was found death, among others—constitute the most important aspects of our mission. According to one of our first volunteers, Alicia, our task was to make people remember that these individuals—without distinction between killers and victims—were once sisters, brothers, or wives. We stress this fact because there has been a governmental campaign to minimize the death toll arguing that most of the victims were hit men, meaning that they either were social “rotten apples” or *Homini Sacer* that could be put to death without ethical condemnation. According to Alicia, the key thing we should try to remember and to display is that every individual who chose to be a hit man perhaps dreamed of being a doctor or an architect.

Being a “Menos Días Aquí” volunteer is not an easy task. I know this because I was the fourth person who began counting murders. Collaborating with us implies a commitment of two to three hours daily for a week to searching and sorting reports of violent killings from national and local media. You become a virtual gravedigger. I still remember that when I was volunteering, I was afraid of reading the papers from Ciudad Juárez, Torreón, Gomez Palacio, and Culiacán because these were the cities where most—and the most violent—of the killings occurred. Unfortunately, that questionable distinction is being challenged by big cities such as Monterrey, Veracruz, Guadalajara, or Morelia.

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Unidentified remains of a victim of the war in the Balkans.

Photo: Alejandro Velez

Every volunteer has a murder that touched his or her cores and that refuses to leave their psyche even weeks after leaving the work of the count. In my case, it was a little girl who was murdered in front of her twin sister by a gunman who intended to kill the man that shared a flat with her father. For Miguel, it was a little girl and her mother: a thief stabbed both women and two weeks later was stabbed himself in the prison where he was imprisoned for the murders. Some volunteers have nightmares. In order to lift the weight of death, most of the volunteers try to systematize the daily count. According to Cordelia, “it was not an easy task to make a note of every victim; my efforts to systematize and make my job more efficient were just enough to create a temporary habit.” However, not all the volunteers are able to do what Cordelia achieved. Cristina told me she was not able to mechanize the job and spent more than three hours every day searching, counting, tweeting, and narrating the killings.

I have invited several friends to the project but few have accepted the invitation because they feel they are unable to bear the weight of 200-300 weekly deaths. I do not judge them. To volunteer with us you need a particular type of personality, sensibility, and commitment. From our headquarters we try to cheer the volunteers daily because we acknowledge it is a depressing task that has to be done accurately. We are aware that there are individuals—maybe thousands—whose deaths are not registered by the media and that our volunteers may make a mistake once in a while. Because of these, our count can only be considered an accurate approximation of the Mexican catastrophe.

After more than a year and a half, “Menos Días Aquí” has, in an almost imperceptible way, become a necrologic archive of huge dimensions. Just like other archives of this kind, our project has helped to preserve from oblivion the horror of almost 25,000 murders in all their brutal detail (signs of torture, beheadings, summary executions, etc.). The best compliment we have received is that several people have told us they have found their dead relatives thanks to

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our project. Sadly, other people had told us that they are still searching for their loved ones. That is why we think it has become necessary to create a national DNA database in order to make possible the correct identification of all the individuals killed. Several researchers have begun pressing to start the discussion of the issue and have asked the ICMP for help.

In the case of our archive at “Menos Días Aquí,” we are working on a new interface to make the count easier as well as to categorize the information we have collected. We have talked with researchers at the Transborder Institute at the University of San Diego, as well as with the IBC webmasters, and they believe that if we can secure funding to categorize and confirm the information we have gathered, we could create a very complete database that would be useful for research purposes.

It was never our purpose just to count the victims and put them in a database as the government does, but we are aware that we have precious information that can be used in the future when the project ceases to exist and Nuestra Aparente Rendición dissolves, which will happen when Mexico recovers the peace it lost. We think this information (archive) could be used to start a healing and reconciliation process and establish a Truth Commission, just as it is slowly happening in Bosnia and the Balkans.

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**Alejandro Velez** holds a B.A. in Political Science from the Instituto Técnico Autónomo de México (ITAM) and a Ph.D. in Humanities from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. His research focuses on issues related to 9/11 and its aftermath, security, surveillance, terrorism, genocide, and the war on drugs. He has lectures at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and is currently an editor at the website [Nuestra Aparente Rendición](#), where he also coordinates the section on Peace Proposals.