

Emily Price

Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas

My Human Rights Project internship (co-funded by the Junior Fellowship) was spent in Chihuahua City and Juarez, Mexico working with Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas (Justice for Our Daughters,) a support network for the mothers of missing young women.

Northern Mexico, specifically the state of Chihuahua, has been home to over 500 uninvestigated kidnappings and femicides over the last ten years, to all of which, until recently, the government response was silent and indifferent, as was that of much of the outside world. Due to the work of grassroots women's groups like Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, Casa Amiga, and Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas, the landscape of justice is beginning to change ever so slightly. Over the past few years they have brought international pressure and attention to a boiling point so that all eyes are focused and Chihuahua, providing a kind of distant human rights observation that will force Mexican government and society to value the lives of these young women and take measures to investigate, prosecute, and prevent violence against women. This year's International V-day, for example, had Juarez as its focus.

Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas, the only organization of it's kind based in Chihuahua City, is essentially a support network and action base for mothers and family members of missing young women, a group which wants to ensure that these young women are not

forgotten and that some kind of justice will be brought in their name. Justicia has staged many marches throughout the city, wearing t-shirts with their daughters' pictures on them, holding signs, and giving out flyers with information on the widespread and repetitive nature of the crimes. They have held sit-ins outside of the governor's office, filled the square outside the Palacio de Gobierno, and built an eleven foot high cross filled with nails, each nail holding the name of a missing young woman from Chihuahua state. During my time working with them, Justicia was preparing to present testimony before the United Nations High Council on Human Rights, as well as Amnesty International.

During my internship I worked with Alma Gomez and Lucha Castro, the pro-bono legal representatives of the organization, to organize speaking engagements in Juarez and Chihuahua City, as well preparing the legal documents to be presented before the UN. We organized and self-published hundreds of pages of documentation and analysis of the crimes, none of which had been seen until that time. I also worked on a booklet collecting twelve women's oral testimonies and am now translating it into English. Toward the end of my time there, I began coordinating with a web-designer to start Justicia's new web-page (which will finally be up this month,) as well as a series of postcards which will be used to keep in touch with their support network outside of Mexico.

As for independent work, I wrote two articles on the Chihuahua City cases, one for Alternet and one for the Independent, gave a number of radio interviews on the

subject, and captured many hours of video testimonies with the families who are part of Justicia.

It would be fair to say that my work in Chihuahua was made-up of a little of everything, and often changed in nature from day to day. It was largely up to me to find ways to stay busy and productive, but there was never a lack of responsibility to be shared or a new project that couldn't be started by someone (like me) who actually had the free time to do it.

Working closely with the families was often difficult, but also inspiring. I learned a great deal about the strength of the bond between mother and child, and realized that for all of their suffering it was also the key to their ability to struggle endlessly, to never rest until they could find the truth. In Chihuahua City alone, over 16 women have disappeared over the past three years, nine of whom have been found dead in locations scattered throughout the city. Not a single one of these women has been found by police, and there is overwhelming evidence of indifference, corruption, and harrassment on the part of authorities. The family members of the victims suffer these indignities as well as their grief, and I saw that many families had broken apart under the strains of mourning and overwhelming anger. I also observed that there is an elongated process after a loss of this kind, as I was working with women who had been looking for their daughters anywhere from three months to three years.

My final follow-up on the internship is the documentary project I am making on some of the women in the group and a local fundraising effort to help support their work.