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UNCLAS CIUDAD JUAREZ 8659

CA/P FOR EDWARD C. DICKENS
CA/OCA/ACS/WH FOR ALICE SEDDON
NSC FOR SAM BROCK

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO, ASEC, CASC, PGOV, SOCI, PHUM, MX
SUBJ: TEXAS NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHTS WOMENQS MURDERS CASES

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IN JUAREZ

REF: A) CDJ 7240 B) CDJ 6117 C) CDJ 2294 D) CDJ 2145 E) CDJ 2018 F) 00 CDJ 1512

1. SUMMARY: ON JUNE 23 AND 24, THE EL PASO TIMES CARRIED A TWO-PART MAJOR STORY ON THE UNSOLVED WOMENQS MURDERS IN JUAREZ. THE ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS THE 80-90 ALLEGED SERIAL MURDERS AMONG OVER 300 WOMENQS DEATHS SINCE 1993. THE STORY COVERS FAMILIAR GROUND AS TO POSSIBLE MOTIVES. THE PAPER ALSO EMPHASIZES LOCAL BELIEFS THAT POLICE CORRUPTION, INEFFICIENCY, AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE MURDERS IS PREVENTING ANY PROGRESS ON THE CASES. THE STORY HAS BEEN PICKED UP BY THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS AND COMPANION PIECES HAVE APPEARED

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: NORMAN M BOUTON
DATE/CASE ID: 05 JUL 2006  200502506
IN THE JUAREZ PRESS. ALTHOUGH PRESS COVERAGE OF THIS ISSUE IN THE AREA IS CONSTANT, THIS IS THE LARGEST ARTICLE TO APPEAR TO DATE. DOS HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT 2000 WAS QUOTED IN THE ARTICLE. END SUMMARY.

2. ON SUNDAY JUNE 23 AND MONDAY JUNE 24, THE EL PASO TIMES CARRIED AN EXTENSIVE TWO-PART SERIES ON THE UNSOLVED MURDERS OF WOMEN IN JUAREZ. THE PAPER ALLEGES THAT OF 325 WOMEN KILLED IN JUAREZ SINCE 1993, 80-90 HAVE BEEN THE VICTIMS OF SERIAL KILLER(S). THE SERIAL VICTIMS WERE GENERALLY POOR YOUNG WOMEN EMPLOYED IN THE MAQUILLADORA INDUSTRY. THEY WERE ABDUCTED, RAPED, STRANGLING AND MUTILATED BEFORE THEIR BODIES WERE DUMPED IN VACANT LOTS, WITH SEVERAL AREAS BECOMING REPEAT DUMPING GROUNDS. TO DATE 18 SUSPECTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN THOSE CASES, WITH ONLY EGYPTIAN
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3. MEXICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS USE SLIGHTLY LOWER FIGURES THAN WASHINGTON VALDEZ BUT CONCEDE THAT AT LEAST SOME OF THE CRIMES ARE SERIAL IN NATURE, PROBABLY BEING COMMITTED BY MORE THAN ONE PERSON.
THEIR EFFORTS HAVE FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON SHARIF AND TWO GROUPS OF BUS DRIVERS SUPPOSEDLY HIRED BY SHARIF FROM PRISON TO CONTINUE THE MURDERS AFTER HIS ARREST, IN ORDER TO DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM HIM (REFS. C AND E). FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS, LOCAL NGOS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS DISCOUNT THAT THEORY. THE LATEST BUS DRIVERS ARRESTED IN NOVEMBER 2001 FOR THE MURDERS OF EIGHT WOMEN SUPPOSEDLY CONFESSED BUT HAVE NOW RECANTED, CLAIMING THEY WERE TORTURED INTO CONFESSIONING. IN A BIZARRE TWIST, THEIR ATTORNEY, MARIO ESCOBEDO JR, WAS CHASED BY STATE POLICE OFFICERS IN FEBRUARY AND GUNNED DOWN. A JUDGE SUBSEQUENTLY RULED THEY HAD FIRED IN SELF-DEFENSE, FURTHER ERODING CONFIDENCE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

4. THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE PRESENTS SEVERAL THEORIES, INCLUDING SATANIC CULTS. IN ADDITION TO THE POLICE INVOLVEMENT THEORY, THE MOST WIDELY COVERED ONES ARE THAT MEMBERS OF PROMINENT FAMILIES ARE INVOLVED, THUS

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ABLE TO COVER UP THEIR ACTS THROUGH POLICE CORRUPTION, OR THAT INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN CROSS THE BORDER EASILY MAY OPERATE AT LEAST PART OF THE TIME FROM EL PASO. HOWEVER, THE BOTTOM LINE IN THE STORY AND AMONG THE GENERAL POPULATION IS THAT POLICE INVOLVEMENT AND/OR CORRUPTION ARE THE MAJOR FACTORS LIMITING THE INVESTIGATION. MANY NGOS EXPRESS THEIR FRUSTRATION WITH THE MEXICAN AUTHORITIES, CITING THEIR FAILURE TO REQUEST FBI ASSISTANCE, EVEN AFTER IT WAS PUBLICLY OFFERED. TWO FBI PROFILERS EXAMINED THE CASES IN 1998 AND 1999 BUT THEIR FINDINGS WERE REJECTED.

5. FURTHER COMPLICATING THE INVESTIGATIONS IS THE CONSTANT SHIFT IN PERSONNEL. THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL RECENTLY APPOINTED THE SEVENTH SPECIAL PROSECUTOR IN CHARGE OF WOMENQS HOMICIDES TO INVESTIGATE THE SERIAL MURDERS. AT LEAST THREE TIMES THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERALQS OFFICE HAS DECLARED THE KILLINGS SOLVED, BUT THE MURDERS CONTINUE. IN SPITE OF THE ARRESTS MADE, NO ONE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY SENTENCED FOR THE CRIMES. RELATIVES OF FOUR OF THE EIGHT VICTIMS FOUND IN NOVEMBER NOW ARE UNSURE WHETHER THEY BURIED THEIR OWN CHILDREN, AS DNA EVIDENCE FAILED TO CONFIRM THE IDENTITIES OF THE BODIES (REF. B). PROTEST MARCHES ORGANIZED BY NGOS ARE HELD REGULARLY, DRAWING PARTICIPANTS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER, AND A LARGE CROSS BEARING THE NAMES OF THE VICTIMS HAS BEEN ERECTED AT ONE OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES. THE RALLYING CRY OF WOMENQS GROUPS, QNI UNA MAS Q NOT ONE MOREQ IS WIDELY KNOWN BUT DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE SPURRED AUTHORITIES TO TAKE MORE SERIOUS ACTION.

6. THE ARTICLE MENTIONED SIX EL PASO OR NEW MEXICO VICTIMS. HOWEVER, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE CASE INVOLVING AN UNSOLVED STRANGULATION, THOSE CASES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN DRUG-RELATED, NOT FITTING THE SERIAL MURDER PATTERN. TWO AMCITS WERE EXECUTED AFTER BEING ABDUCTED IN 1998. THEY WERE KNOWN ASSOCIATES OF EDWARD BARRAGÁN, WHO IS LISTED AMONG THE MISSING IN JUÁREZ AND CONNECTED TO THE DRUG TRADE. ANOTHER AMCIT, CINTHIA PORTILLO, WAS FATALLY SHOT IN MAY IN AN APPARENT DRUG-RELATED DISPUTE BETWEEN HER BOYFRIENDQS EMPLOYER AND UNIDENTIFIED GUNMEN (REF. A). THEIR CASES HIGHLIGHT HOW THE TWO ISSUES, THE MURDERED WOMEN...
AND THE DISAPPEARED PERSONS, SOMETIMES INTERSECT. TO DATE, NO POSSIBLE VICTIMS OF THE SERIAL MURDERS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS AMCITS.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THESE ARTICLES REPRESENT AN INCREASED LEVEL OF PRESS COVERAGE AND NGO INVOLVEMENT REMAINS STRONG, ON THE WHOLE NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED. ABSENT ENHANCED POLITICAL WILL TO USE ADDITIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES (POSSIBLY FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER), THE SITUATION IS LIKELY TO REMAIN THE SAME.

JOHNSON-CASARES

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