

## “Reconquistando” La Laguna

### PRESS BULLETIN

An investigation by Sergio Aguayo and Jacobo Dayán

with contributions by Javier Garza<sup>1</sup>

- A story of horror and hope
- To be presented on Tuesday, October 20 at 11:30 p.m.

In 2012, 1,060 homicides were committed in the La Laguna area of northern Mexico. In 2018, the number of violent deaths dropped to 139. In other words, homicides fell from an average of 3 per day to one every 4 days. As for missing persons, there were 121 reports in 2009, a figure that was reduced to 14 in 2017.

The violence, had started to grow several years earlier and reached its most terrible extreme in March 2011, when in Piedras Negras, Allende and other neighboring municipalities, over 300 people were murdered in a single weekend. In August of the same year, there was a shootout in Torreón outside a stadium where a soccer match was being broadcast on national television, and in Monterrey, Los Zetas set fire to the Casino Royale, killing 53 people.

Equally serious was the fact that organized crime controlled the penitentiaries of Piedras Negras, Torreón and Gómez Palacio, among others. These prisons were turned into fortresses by criminals who not only ruled these facilities, but also sent out commandos who robbed and killed, only to return peacefully once their missions had been completed.

The figures and facts take on even greater relevance given that by 2011, Torreón was considered one of the five most violent cities in the world. However, in 2018, crime rates had fallen significantly in the La Laguna urban area, while other cities had surpassed it by far, for example, Acapulco with 845, Reynosa with 268 or Celaya with 271 homicides, respectively, for that year.

The above data comes from the book *Defeating Los Zetas, 2007-2014*, an investigation by El Colegio de México researcher Sergio Aguayo and Jacobo Dayán of the Universidad Iberoamericana, with contributions by journalist Javier Garza Ramos.

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This book reconstructs "the methods of infiltration and control of government institutions" at state and municipal levels, as well as the tendency of court officials of "always stopping short of assigning responsibility to high-level government officials and businesspeople", despite of which the fight against crime was able to achieve enormous progress.

According to the authors, the actions to curb cartel-related violence in La Laguna represents the most successful example nationwide. The conclusions of the investigation show that these results were possible thanks to local businesspeople, civil society organizations/NGOs, victims' groups and religious groups, working together with the decisive intervention of all three levels of government and the governor at the time, Rubén Moreira.

In contrast, the experience with the state and municipal governments of neighboring Durango was less fortunate, which may be attributed to a lack of official records; therefore, the authors consider that the story of La Laguna is incomplete remaining: further aspects to be more thoroughly explored..

Nevertheless, in La Laguna "a model of inter-municipal cooperation in an urban area" was developed with relative success and to date, according to Alfonso Durazo, Federal Secretary of Public Security, this continues to be "our best model, and one that we will invariably promote in other areas of Mexico."

Despite the successful reduction in the amount of violence, there still remains debt in terms of truth, justice, the search for the missing and reparations.

*The studio presentation may be accessed via the following link [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_p95GbZXiTnqrRT\\_HBxqeZQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_p95GbZXiTnqrRT_HBxqeZQ) on October 20, at 11:30 p.m. with the presence of Silvia Giorguli, the authors, and the commentary of both journalist Denise Maerker and researcher Mónica Serrano.*