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Mexico's drug wars take death toll to record high

Government struggles to convince many that its military-focused strategy will eventually bring cartels to heel

Jo Tuckman in Mexico City
The Guardian, Monday 11 January 2010

The start of 2010 has been marked by a major escalation of [Mexico's](#) drug wars, increasing pressure on a government already struggling to convince many that its military-focused strategy will eventually bring the cartels to heel.

El Universal newspaper reported today that 69 people had died violently in the previous 24-hour period, the biggest daily death toll yet in the struggle for supremacy within Mexican organised crime that lies at the heart of the wars. The paper said that 283 people had died in 2010 so far, more than double the figure from the same period last year.

The government accepts that the unprecedented offensive launched by President Felipe Calderón three years ago has prompted an explosion of inter-cartel violence. It claims the killing betrays the desperation of traffickers feeling the heat, but a growing number of voices in Mexico are calling for a new strategy.

According to El Universal, more than a third of the 69 Mexicans killed between Friday and Saturday died in Ciudad Juárez just over the border from the Texas city of El Paso. Several were beheaded, but the toll did not include the victim discovered early on Friday whose face had been stitched on to a football.

The vast majority of drug war victims are linked to the underworld. About a tenth are law enforcement officials and a small number of civilians.

Among those at risk are journalists covering the police beat for local papers. The body of the latest reporter to fall victim was found on Friday alongside a note warning: "This is going to happen to those who don't understand that the message is for everyone."

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