Ayotzinapa's Message to the World: Organize!

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- It has been two years to the day since the crime of Ayotzinapa. A moment of soul-searching for Mexico.

You can feel it in the streets. You can read it in the many articles and messages that look back to the terrible night that that six lives were lost and 43 disappeared and a nation was forced to come to terms with the violence and corruption at its heart

Ayotzinapa, the rural teachers' college set on a mountainside in the dirt-poor state of Guerrero, marches again, like on the 26th of every month, but now to commemorate two full years of impunity and lies.

It could be a time for mourning. It could be an act of rage. Many, especially the families, do still feel the mourning and the rage, and they will every day until, unless, their sons are returned. But to see that day, after hundreds of nights of tears and scores of meetings, marches, press conferences, community talks, parents and fellow students have one message: Organize.

"We need more participation of the people. More serious and responsible organization," says Omar Garcia, an Ayotzinapa student who survived the attacks and has become a powerful spokesperson for the movement to bring his friends back alive.

It's grassroots organization– in Mexico and the world– that has kept the memory of the students alive far beyond the aggrieved hearts of their parents and demanded that the crime of the state be punished. Today, to remember is more important than ever.

The power of transformation

Mexicans from all over the country felt something snap when they heard of the students abducted and disappeared in the city of Iguala. They responded with demonstrations that reached hundreds of thousands strong in late 2014. Their slogan—IT WAS THE STATE—changed the way people think about the Mexican government, its relationship to organized crime and the war on drugs that has taken more than 140,000 lives in the past nine years.

Looking back, there's no doubt that the crime of Ayotzinapa has transformed the grassroots of the country. While the government has responded by closing ranks and attempting to close the case, the people have taken to the streets.

The movement has been relentless in its demands of a government that refuses to investigate itself. The Ayotzinapa movement won a major victory with the invitation to allow an independent body form the Organization of American States, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts or GIEI, to investigate the crime. Their final report, presented in May of this year, showed that state involvement went way beyond the municipal police working with a local crime group.

It proved that the events of September 26 and 27 were coordinated actions among several government agencies, with the direct participation of at least the federal, state and municipal police, and a criminal organization. The report established the presence of the Mexican Army at the scene of the crime, and emphasized the importance of taking testimonies from the Army to clarify events and its role in them. The Army refused repeatedly to allow the GIEI to directly interview Army personnel involved the night of the crime. The role of the armed forces continues to be key to the state cover-up of the case.

The GIEI report shot down the government position that the students were burned at the Cocula dump, for lack of consistency and proof. As the Peña Nieto administration put forth modifications to its false history, the experts critically analyzed them and revealed the factual inconsistencies. In other words, they were exposed as lies. Most glaringly, the state was left without a hypothetical motive, fanning suspicions that the students were attacked for political reasons and that the governments–on all levels–moved fast to hide grave acts of corruption, complicity and violence.

The group of experts left the country without having arrived at the truth or the missing students. They left, angry and disappointed, because the federal government refused to extend their investigation. The experts presented evidence of the obstacles and lack of cooperation from Peña Nieto's Attorney General's Office and other government agencies. The hundreds of people who listened to the presentation and the millions more who saw it or read about it felt a deep sense of gratitude, but at the same time abandonment. If you live in a nation where impunity is the rule, impartial and professional assistance from outside can be a lifeline.

But it is no doubt the grassroots organization that has made this case a turning point in history and that will continue the pressure to find the students and to the change the country. Omar Garcia sends out a challenge: "We've asked the Mexican government officials not to abandon the investigation, and we also want to ask the movement–the students themselves, people who have been involved in social change historically and those who have not but are beginning to be—that the struggle be for real. We have to transform this country."

That means everyone, everywhere, and not just for Ayotzinapa. Ayotzinapa has become a symbol of fighting back against the forces that seek to stifle the necessary rebellion of youth. The kind of transformation he refers to is global and local, direct and transcendent.

"To organize in serious way for us means to use the resources you have, as an individual and as a collective," Garcia told me in an interview. "You can do things. And even though they're very small things, do them. Inform yourself, analyze the information. Now information is accessible through the social networks. We don't need Televisa and Television Azteca and all these other mass media. As long as you have an interest in being informed, you can find information."

For Mexico two years after Ayotzinapa there is a huge unfinished agenda. The first point on the http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/18780">Ayotzinapa Agenda is to find the disappeared students and the other 28,000 disappeared in the country. Ayotzinapa spurred a movement of the disappeared that reminds us that the problem runs deep and affects thousands of families, with more being added each day.

Other points include tasks related to the investigation itself: to follow up on unresolved questions such as the fifth bus that was escorted out of the scene of the crime that night by federal police; to thoroughly interrogate, and prosecute if need be, military personnel involved in the events; to demand new interviews with witnesses, and presentation and analysis of missing phone registers; to prosecute any government officials responsible for violation of procedures, tampering with, destruction of and loss of evidence, and distortion of the facts; to further investigate evidence of torture discovered in at least 17 of the suspects' questioning.

Most important, are the big tasks of establishing why the students were attacked, killed and disappeared–exposing the masterminds of the crime and not just the perpetrators. And we must all take on a serious commitment to find the other 28,000 disappeared, demand prosecution for disappearance and forced disappearance (disappearance with the involvement of the state), and guarantee the safety of family members and human rights defenders.

These are government responsibilities, but in the context of a criminal state, society itself must assume responsibility.

No one is exempt from this responsibility. In Mexico, the process has begun. In large part, thanks to the tragedy of Ayotzinapa. Demands for truth and justice grow. The families of the disappeared in Coahuila, Veracruz, Guerrero and states throughout the nation remember and demand and search the fields for their loved ones with shovels and picks. Solidarity groups exist in every continent of the globe. The faces of the 43 are born solemnly in the streets of Madrid, Los Angeles, New York and Athens. The movement struck a chord, a chord not just of compassion but also of resistance.

Therein lies the hope amid the pain. "We have to participate, to dedicate part of our time to participate in organized associations to change the country," Garcia states. "There are already examples on the national level, examples in different states, that can show us the way. On the Latin American level, too. There are experiences that demonstrate that you really can change things in a positive way."

If grief-stricken mothers and fathers and friends and siblings can take on that challenge, so can the rest of us.