

Emergency measures haven't slowed rising violence against women in Mexico State

By Alan Hernández

Years of pressure from activists and victims over rampant gender-related violence in Mexico State eventually led the government to declare an official "gender alert" in July 2015.

One year on, things look even worse.

The alert promised emergency measures such as the creation of a special prosecutor's office for gender crimes, new protocols for the police, the intensification of efforts to find missing women, and the creation of shelters where women forced to flee their homes could live.

"This is an historic and unprecedented opportunity to improve the situation of women in Mexico State," the country's interior ministry had said in its statement announcing the alert on July 31, 2015.

Last year, however, the state recorded 59 femicides — murders of women who were targeted at least partly because of their gender. This continued the steady increase in the annual number of victims seen in recent years, aside from a small drop in 2013.

There were 39 more femicides registered during the first five months of 2016 — already two thirds of last year's total. A third of this year's murders took place in the city of Ecatepec, a sprawling and dense municipality of 1.6 million people located just north of the capital.

The authorities have suggested that the rise could actually be because of more diligent investigation.

"Due to the alert all violent deaths of women must now be investigated with a gender perspective," Dilcy García, the special prosecutor for gender crimes, recently told Mexican newspaper *El Universal*.

In the meantime the state has consolidated its official position as one of the country's most dangerous places for women. The Mexican statistics institute INEGI said the murder rate for women in the state in 2013 was 35 per 100,000 inhabitants.

The declaration of a gender alert in Mexico State, sparked a similar announcement in the state of Morelos a month later, and multiple calls for more.

They come amid a wider wave of high profile violence against women across Latin America, alongside increasingly vocal public outrage over entrenched *machismo*.

The violence included the rape of a 16 year old by at least 30 men in Brazil in May, and two cases of gang rape in Argentina involving girls of just 12 and 13.

The gang rape in Brazil took place just after interim president Michel Temer took over from suspended president Dilma Rousseff pending an impeachment trial. He soon faced widespread criticism for appointing a cabinet with no women in it at all.

This week, Argentina's President Mauricio Macri announced changes to next year's curricula at all school levels to address gender violence.

"We must banish the cultural patterns that normalize aggression against women," Macri said during the presentation of the program in the presidential palace on Tuesday. "The most important thing is that education should be a fundamental component."

Local media contrasted these statements with an old recording of Macri from 2014 when he was mayor of the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires.

"All women like to be given compliments," he said. "There's nothing nicer [than a compliment], even if it's a bit rude, like getting told that you have a nice ass. It's all good."