

Authorities detain 15 suspects, including one policeman, in Heaven's nightclub killings

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Friends and family of the Heaven's nightclub incident continue to fight for justice in honor of the 12 victims kidnapped and killed in May. Photo: Cuartoscuro.

09/20/13 – The number of suspects detained in connection with the kidnapping and killing of 12 youth from a Mexico City nightclub has risen to 15 individuals, authorities say, five of which were captured in the past week. According to the Federal District's Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal, PGJDF), six of the captured suspects are confirmed of having an active role in the incident and are under criminal proceedings, seven are being held under preventative arrest (*arraigo*), and the remaining two are awaiting to hear of their legal situation. All the arrests stem from the May 26 kidnapping of 12 youth from the Mexico City nightclub Heaven, whose decapitated or mutilated bodies were found in a mass grave in the neighboring State of México (Estado de México, Edomex) on August 26. Authorities are unsure exactly how many individuals were involved, but believe there to be at least 20 suspects.

On Sunday, September 15, Mexican officials announced the capture of three suspects—Jonathan Omar Robles González, Pedro Francisco López, and Fernando Fernandez Sánchez—who confessed to “their direct participation in the kidnapping of the victims,” reported the PGJDF. They are all being held under *arraigo* as authorities continue to investigate and build their case. Just four days later, on September 19, the PGJDF brought in two more suspects, César Iván Romero Reyes and Édgar Ernesto Gutiérrez Vera. Romero Reyes had a previous criminal record, while Gutiérrez Vera is an active six-year member in the Federal District's Ministry of Public Security (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública del DF, SSPDF). According to DF Attorney General Rodolfo Ríos, an investigation tracing and tracking Gutiérrez Vera's phone calls, as well as witness testimonies, confirmed his involvement. Authorities were also suspicious of his comfortable lifestyle and personally owned vehicles despite his below average salary as a policeman. Attorney General Ríos could not confirm if Officer Gutiérrez Vera had passed his integrity exam (*examen de control de confianza*), a test used to vet and screen police officers in an effort to decrease corruption and ties to organized crime among public security officials.

Whether or not Gutiérrez Vera had links to criminal organizations, concern has grown over whether the Heaven's nightclub killings are a sign of criminal organizations infiltrating the Federal District. Mexican

security expert Guy Ben-Nun argues that this case points in that direction, especially considering the confession of Pedro Francisco Paz López, one of the seven suspects held under *arraigo*. According to *Diario de México*, Paz López admitted that he took orders from Javier Joel Rodríguez, one of the alleged leaders of the criminal organization La Unión, to kill the last of the 12 kidnapped victims. La Unión operates largely in the DF, and authorities believe that the Heaven's killings resulted from an internal dispute within the organization. Ben-Nun also argues that it is clear the murders were executed by a higher-level organization, not just a street gang. "The kidnappers arrived in a planned manner, kidnapped the youths with all the organization that such an act would require; they knew how to do it. They controlled the bar, they knew where to take them, and how they were going to kill them," he explained. "That is the work of organized crime." Mexico City Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera has denied such infiltration, saying the crime was likely committed by street gangs.

The investigation into the Heaven's killings continues, with authorities announcing they have now identified ten of the 12 victims in the grave; two of the bodies' remains have been returned to the victims' families.

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