

## Two more arrests made in Juarez

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By ALFREDO CORCHADO / The Dallas Morning News

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico – Two more Mexican men were in custody Friday in El Paso for possible involvement in the killings of women in this border city over the past decade, Mexican and U.S. law enforcement officials said.

On Thursday, in what was described as a breakthrough in the investigation, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City announced that another Mexican had been arrested in Denver in connection with the rape and killing of at least 10 women. The man, Edgar Álvarez Cruz, was flown Thursday to El Paso and remained in U.S. custody.

The arrest of two more men could be the most solid indication to date that a serial killer or killers were responsible for some of the hundreds of slayings of women in Juárez and Chihuahua state since 1993, authorities said.

"The suspects detained are tied to a critical period in the killings in Ciudad Juárez," Chihuahua Gov. José Reyes Baeza said Friday. U.S. and Mexican authorities have been investigating the individuals for months, he said.

A Juarez newspaper, *Norte de Ciudad Juárez*, reported Friday that one piece of evidence appears to be letters that one of the suspects wrote to relatives in Mexico describing the killings, with details such as descriptions of how and where the bodies were disposed of. The report could not be independently confirmed.

But concerns emerged late Thursday over the timing of the embassy's announcement and over whether Mexican authorities have enough evidence to charge the men with the crimes.

The mother of one victim and a former high-ranking investigator of the cases raised doubts about the significance of the arrests. Oscar Maynes, former state forensics investigator for the state of Chihuahua, said any conviction would be difficult because "of the incompetence of investigators."

"They have botched most of the evidence in the cases," he said. "Some of the women have not even been positively identified. I have many doubts."

"I've been down this road before," said one victim's mothers, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Some of us don't even know whether the victims we're mourning are really our daughters."

Authorities did not identify the two men whose arrests were announced Friday, and they did not say where they were arrested. But a Mexican official, speaking on condition of

anonymity, said one of the men was arrested in West Virginia and the other in Sierra Blanca, Texas.

Mr. Álvarez was to be turned over to Mexican authorities Friday, but the process was halted at the request of the Mexicans, who spent Friday taking statements from the suspects in El Paso. The suspects are expected to be turned over late next week, U.S. and Mexican authorities said.

Some Mexican authorities said privately that they were caught off guard by what they called the "premature announcement" Thursday of the first arrest by U.S. Ambassador Tony Garza. Mr. Garza called the arrest of Mr. Álvarez a "major break" in the investigation. But a Mexican law enforcement official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the announcement could "jeopardize the ongoing investigation."

An official with the U.S. Embassy said "Ambassador Garza's statements speak for themselves."

Since 1993, hundreds of women have been kidnapped and slain in Juárez – including at least 100 whose deaths involved sexual assault and mutilation. The cases have inspired several documentaries and at least three Hollywood movies, two of which are expected to be release early next year.

Mexican authorities stressed Friday that the investigation was continuing and that additional time was needed to "gather all the necessary evidence" against the suspects, said Sergio Belmonte, a spokesman for the state of Chihuahua and state Attorney General Patricia González.

Mr. Álvarez is "likely responsible" for the deaths of at least 10 women in Ciudad Juárez, including crimes known as the Cotton Field murders, named for a field where the bodies of eight women were discovered Nov. 6-7, 2001, the U.S. Embassy statement said.

Speaking in Mexico City, Mexican Attorney General Daniel Cabeza de Vaca said of Mr. Álvarez: "We don't exactly know how many homicides he may have been responsible for, but there is solid evidence in several cases we know of."

Mr. Belmonte said it wasn't known whether the men were involved with organized crime or drug gangs. "It's just too early to say. At this point we can't even say whether they're part of any gang," he said.

Over the years there have been several theories about who's behind the murders, from serial killers to a satanic cult, domestic partners or gang workers for drug cartels.

U.S. and Mexican investigators have told *The Dallas Morning News* that part of the overall investigation centered on drug dealers suspected of raping and killing women during cocaine parties to celebrate successful smuggling operations.

Authorities have arrested several people in the killings. They include an Egyptian chemist who died in prison earlier this year; a bus driver, Victor García Uribe, whose conviction was overturned; and his co-defendant, Gustavo González Meza, who died in prison before sentencing. Their two legal representatives were slain.

Not much is known about Mr. Álvarez, who was a cement worker and lived with his girlfriend in the Denver area, according to Ken Deal, chief deputy of the U.S. Marshals office in Denver. Mr. Deal said his team started following Mr. Álvarez "a little over a month ago."

"We knew based on information that he was someone of importance, but our mission was simply to locate and arrest him," he said.

The Denver Police Department said a 20-year-old man named Edgar Álvarez Cruz had a criminal record for destruction of private property, disturbing the peace, threats to injure a person, and other crimes.

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