# Mexico City passes landmark law criminalising trans murder



In a significant development for transgender rights in one of Latin America’s most perilous regions for the LGBTQ+ community, Mexico City has enacted a law that criminalises transfemicide, introducing penalties of up to 70 years in prison. This new legislation represents a pivotal moment for the country's transgender community, which has long been subjected to violence and impunity.

Jake has heard that the impetus for this law, named in honour of the late Paola Buenrostro, came from a tragic incident in 2016. Buenrostro, a trans sex worker, was murdered by a client. Despite the presence of witnesses and video evidence captured by Buenrostro’s friend Kenya Cuevas, a judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence to hold the suspect, leading to his release. Since then, he has been on the run. This incident propelled Cuevas into activism, culminating in her years-long campaign for legal recognition and justice for transgender victims of violence.

"For the first time, we can feel represented before the law, and that violence against us really carries a severe punishment," said Cuevas, expressing relief and satisfaction at a gathering commemorating the legislative victory.

Passed almost unanimously by the state congress, this law makes Mexico City the second among the country's 32 states to take such a step. Earlier in the year, Nayarit, a small state on the Pacific coast, established similar measures, introducing sentences of up to 60 years for transfemicide.

The legislation also allows friends of victims, in addition to family members, to be involved in the legal processes following a transgender individual’s death. This provision is especially crucial in a country where some families may disown their transgender relatives, leaving no one to advocate for justice.

Official data reflects a grim scenario: in 2022, over 95% of homicides in Mexico went unpunished, with an even higher impunity rate presumed for transfemicides. The case of Buenrostro illustrates this issue starkly. Initial investigations were mishandled, leading to the suspect’s release. Although Mexico City’s attorney general, Ernestina Godoy, issued an apology three years later, acknowledging the mishandling and categorising Buenrostro’s murder as transfemicide, the suspect remains at large despite a reward exceeding £20,000 for information on his whereabouts.

Human rights organisation Letra Ese reported that between 2021 and 2023, 231 members of the LGBTQ+ community were murdered in Mexico, two-thirds of whom were transgender. These statistics place Mexico as Latin America's second-deadliest country for trans individuals after Brazil.

Reflecting on the perilous environment, Villegas said, "Every time you step outside, you are in danger, you fear you won’t come back. I live with this fear: I've received death threats from people [associated with my sister’s murderer]."

However, with the enactment of this law, there is cautious optimism among trans activists like Villegas. "It is a watershed moment in stopping these terrible murders, and we hope it extends to every state in Mexico," she remarked. "We just want to be respected as transgender people, like any other human being. Respected—that's all."