

Father of Ayotzinapa student is heard in NY

By CLAUDIA TORRENS January 29, 2020



Antonio Tizapa waves a flag for the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa during the Fred Lebow Half Marathon in Central Park, New York, on January 19, 2020. (AP Photo / Richard Drew)

NEW YORK (AP) - He was running alone.

This is how Antonio Tizapa, the father of one of the 43 students who disappeared in Mexico in 2014, dealt with his pain in a Brooklyn park.

He wore a T-shirt with the words “Ayotzinapa,” the name of the town where the young people studied, and he sweated the frustration he felt living more than 3,000 kilometers from Mexico, unable to hug his wife after the disappearance of his son Jorge Antonio.

The students disappeared the morning of September 26 while traveling by bus from the southern state of Guerrero to the capital to participate in a commemorative march for the Tlatelolco massacre, which occurred in 1968.

Authorities initially said the boys had fallen into the hands of organized crime and, after being killed and cremated, their remains were thrown into a river. However, allegations of irregularities by their parents and independent experts ruled out that explanation and the current Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has made the clarification of the case one of his main promises.

Five years later, dozens of immigrants have joined Antonio in races, marathons or simply protesting in the streets of the American city, joining his hunger strikes in front of the Mexican consulate or marching to demand justice in the heart of Manhattan.

“You are not alone!” Some shouted at him in the middle of Times Square after the father was excited when he tried to speak to protesters at a protest in 2015.

More than 100 immigrants, mostly Mexicans, wear green shirts designed by Antonio with the words “Running for Ayotzinapa 43” when they train in small groups in New York parks and when they participate in races in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Texas, Miami or Washington.

“It occurred to me to use athletics as a diffusive measure, but I never thought I would be we are now,” says Antonio. “I just wanted to run, carry this message, with my legs and my heart in my hand. And there is the result. I have made more people aware of the reality of Mexico. “





Antonio, 52, has been in New York for more than two decades, after crossing the border in 1999.

In Tixla, Guerrero, he was a book sales agent until he decided to emigrate to the United States to offer a better life for his wife and three children, including Jorge Antonio. He crossed the border, joined his brother in Brooklyn, and started working as a plumber.

In 2010 he started running to lose weight.

Four years later, after the attack on the students, the administration of former Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto released the alleged “historical truth” about his disappearance.

The Mexican courts ordered in June 2018 to reinstate the entire investigation for the numerous irregularities found, including that several of the testimonies were obtained through torture. These deficiencies in the process meant that more than 70 of the 143 detainees linked to the case are already free, including the main suspects. No one has been convicted.

The IACHR has asked Mexico that the group of international experts return to investigate on the ground, as it did in 2015. With the coming to power of López Obrador more than a year ago, the Commission for Truth and Access to Justice of the Ayotzinapa case and the searches were reactivated, but results have still not come.

“There is no progress. We have already had a year and the whereabouts of our children have not been determined,” Antonio said on a recent Tuesday, with a coffee in hand and his clothes still dusty after fixing a gas leak



in the basement of a building in Queens. “The people have a great responsibility not to remain silent.”

On the 26th of each month, the Mexican stands in front of the consulate with several signs, including one that says “We are missing 43.”

Distance has been an obstacle to which he has had to resign himself.

The last time he saw Jorge Antonio in person, he was five years old. They have been on the phone since.

“You realize that your son is growing up,” says the immigrant. “When he was a child he was waiting for Santa Claus or Three Kings Day. And he said ‘he brought me one thing or the other’. Then, when he grew up, I would tell him to take care of his mother, his brothers. That, if he had a girlfriend, he would be good “

Antonio managed to see his wife Hilda in 2015 when she visited Philadelphia and New York with a group of mothers of the students brought to the United States to see Pope Francis. They were together almost a week.

“There was no time to finish talking about everything we had to talk about,” says Antonio.

That year Amado Tlatempa, a 39-year-old Mexican cook in New York, the cousin of two of the missing students, joined the group of runners. In November he ran the New York marathon in the green singlet.

“We do not want (Ayotzinapa) to be forgotten. Many people already identify with us ”, says the cook, who has

been in the Big Apple for more than a decade.

The fever to run and give visibility to this fight has also spread to some in Antonio's native country, especially in the State of Mexico, where small groups of runners have formed who wear the same green shirts, sent regularly by the Mexican by mail.

Marcos Casimiro asked for and received one and puts it on to participate in races such as the Mexico City Marathon, which he ran last year.

"There is a lot of support from people on the street. A lot of people are yelling at us," said the 60-year-old Mexican, now retired and a former employee of a steel screw factory.

Antonio posts photos and broadcasts many of the group's races in New York live through the Facebook page of "Running for Ayotzinapa 43".

In December the group organized a race in Brooklyn attended by almost 400 runners.

"I'm not going to shut up," says Antonio. "I don't have to duck my head."

The AP journalist in Mexico City, María Verza, contributed to this article.