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Mexican city is 'murder capital of the world'

Ciudad Juarez, the Mexican city gripped by a drug cartel war, has laid new claim to the title "murder capital of the world" as the number of killings so far this year passed 2,000.

By Nick Allen in Los Angeles

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The city of 1.5 million people just across the border from El Paso, Texas, had 1,600 murders last year but in 2009 that total was exceeded by late summer.

Latest figures from the Chihuahua state attorney general's office showed there were 195 this month alone.

The annual murder rate has now reached 133 per 100,000 inhabitants, surpassing Caracas, Venezuela. The comparable murder rate in New York last year was six per 100,000.

Norte, the local newspaper in Ciudad Juarez, reported: "With this, our city has reached a new historic mark in violent acts that verifies this is the most violent zone in the world outside of declared war zones."

The victims in Ciudad Juarez this year have included 85 children, 107 women and 49 police officers. There have been beheadings and dismemberments and one victim was tied between two trucks and ripped apart. Most of the crimes remain unsolved.

Mayor Jose Reyes Ferriz, who is awaiting the arrival of 1,000 new police officers, said most of the bodies were gang members who came from elsewhere to fight in Ciudad Juarez.

He said: "The violence has increased, and the possibility that it will stop is becoming more remote." Rival drug gangs are trying to secure a smuggling route between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso.

Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán, head of one of the drug groups, the Sinaloa cartel, is Mexico's most wanted man.

President Felipe Calderón began a crackdown against drug traffickers shortly after taking office in Dec 2006.

Since then, the government has deployed more than 45,000 soldiers and federal police to areas where drug gangs operate.

The new US Ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual, said: "Drug trafficking is a threat to the entire hemisphere. It is a threat that has points of supply and demand and traffic.

"We have to analyse the problem as well, engage, invest in resources and capabilities to address all those issues."

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