

# **#NiUnaMenos, #BlackWednesday: Argentina's women joined across South America in marches against violence**

Thursday 27 October 2016, by [GOÑI Uki](#), [The Guardian](#) (Date first published: 20 October 2016).

**Ni Una Menos demonstrations spurred by rape and killing of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez as thousands of protesters call for action on crimes against women.**

The crowd of women packed into the historic square of Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires under the freezing rain was so vast that some had to close their umbrellas to all fit together. "Machismo Kills," read the hand-painted sign held aloft by one young woman.

Tens of thousands of women marched here on Wednesday to protest the growing problem of violence against women in Argentina, a problem so prevalent that the country sanctioned a law four years ago legally defining as "femicide" cases of domestic violence, so-called "honour" killings and other categories of hate crimes against women.

The Buenos Aires march was matched by others across Argentina and other South American countries, after women's groups called for solidarity via social media under the hashtags #NiUnaMenos ("Not one less", meaning not one more woman lost to male violence) and #BlackWednesday.

"This is a march against femicide," supreme court judge Elena Highton de Nolasco told the press on the eve of the march. "Cases of femicide are growing in number, they are becoming more violent, more perverse - we even had the news today that there have been 19 femicides in the last 18 days."

"Walking home I want to feel free, not brave," read another sign by one of the marchers on Wednesday.

"I came because they are killing women who could be my sisters, my friends," said one young marcher.

Similar marches were held in all of Argentina's main cities, while the Ni Una Menos movement transcended the country's borders. Demonstrations also took place in Mexico, El Salvador, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The protest was prompted by the abduction of Lucía Pérez, a schoolgirl who was drugged, raped and tortured earlier this month in the coastal city of Mar del Plata.

The cruelty of her attack was such that Pérez suffered a cardiac arrest, according to prosecutor María Isabel Sánchez, who described it as "an act of inhuman sexual aggression".

Following their assault, the assailants washed the 16-year-old in an attempt to erase forensic

evidence and took her to a nearby hospital, where she died shortly after arrival from internal injuries sustained during her rape.

"I know it's not very professional to say this, but I'm a mother and a woman, and though I've seen thousands of cases in my career, I've never seen anything like this," prosecutor Sánchez told local media.

But Pérez's murder is just the latest in a harrowing sequence of "femicides", crimes usually committed by husbands, boyfriends, family members or acquaintances of the victim. In more than one case, the woman has been set on fire by her partner.

The unrelenting series of killings led Michelle Bachelet, president of neighbouring Chile, to post a video on Twitter saying that similar cases of violence in her own country "have led me to join Ni Una Menos, the social movement born in Argentina, which expresses the frustration felt by our own compatriots at the cases of violence against women and girls" [1].

Every 30 hours in Argentina a woman is killed in such crimes, according to statistics kept by La Casa del Encuentro, an NGO that helps female victims of violence.

**Uki Goñi**, in Buenos Aires

\* The Guardian. Thursday 20 October 2016 04.36 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/20/argentina-women-south-america-marches-violence-ni-una-menos>

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## ***The Guardian view on NiUnaMenos: challenging misogyny and murder***

**Activists challenging gender-based abuse and killings have already changed laws in Latin America. Changing attitudes is tougher.**

Black-clad girls and women downed tools, pens and keyboards in Argentina's major cities today and took to the streets to demand "no more machista violence" [2]. Their strike and demonstration followed similar protests across the region: seven of the 10 countries with the highest rate of female murder victims are in Latin America [3], where activists say the phenomenon reflects not only high rates of violence, social conflict and organised crime, but also a cultural strain of aggressive hypermasculinity. Now people have had enough. Though there have been powerful women's movements in the region for a long time, the campaign against gender-based violence has gathered momentum, culminating in the #NiUnaMenos - "not one less" - movement.

The symbolic power of so many women standing together proves that focusing on victims does not mean portraying women as passive. These protests have given women a name and face and presence in death, when their killers and society more broadly objectified or ignored them. They have shown that violence is not only the result of inequality and discrimination but also a mechanism perpetuating such problems.

While the concept of femicide - generally understood as the misogynistic or gender-related killing of

women – has been particularly resonant in Latin America, it is employed worldwide. Last year, the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women, Dubravka Šimonović, urged all member states to establish a “femicide watch” [4] and publish the statistics each year. The UK already has such a project, the volunteer-run Femicide Census [5], but only because Karen Ingala Smith began tallying deaths independently [6].

Focusing on femicide must be done with care: it is a way of forcing society to confront violence against women, not of allowing authorities to ignore anything short of murder – both because lower-level violence is more prevalent, and because men who murder their partners usually have a history of attacking them. Acknowledging the commonalities is not a reason to ignore social and cultural differences that result in very different patterns of crimes against women in different places [7], such as dowry-related violence and so-called “honour killings”. And the success of Latin American movements in achieving legal change must be set against the difficulties of enforcing those laws and effecting a shift in social attitudes [8]: not just prosecuting and punishing gender-related crimes but preventing them.

Perhaps the movement’s greatest value has been in making connections that are often overlooked: challenging the lines drawn between categories such as domestic and stranger violence, and related judgments about the “worthiness” of victims or the importance of cases. The latest protest was sparked by the rape and murder of a schoolgirl. But in others, marchers have reacted explicitly to attempts to dismiss victims on the basis of factors such as their sexual behaviour. Not one less schoolgirl; but, equally, not one less sex worker, or gang member. Paradoxically, by focusing on the value of each and every woman’s life, the movement turns our attention away from what they have or haven’t done and towards the actions of violent men – which are, after all, what must change.

### ***The Guardian Editorial***

\* The Guardian. Wednesday 19 October 2016 19.39 BST Last modified on Wednesday 19 October 2016 22.00 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/20/argentina-women-south-america-marches-violence-ni-una-menos>

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### **Footnotes**

[1] [https://twitter.com/presidencia\\_cl/status/788861704918691840](https://twitter.com/presidencia_cl/status/788861704918691840)

[2] ESSF (article 39344), [Latin America – Brazil and Argentina unite in protest against culture of sexual violence](#).

[3] <https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/mimi-yagoub/why-does-latin-america-have-worlds-highest-female-murder-rates>

[4] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16796&LangID=E>

[5] <https://kareningalasmith.com/tag/femicidecensus/>

[6] <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/02/why-we-need-femicide-census>

[7] [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77421/1/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.38\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77421/1/WHO_RHR_12.38_eng.pdf)

[8] <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/07/bolivia-measures-counteract-gender-violence>

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