



Background information on the Edelstam Prize laureate 2022: Norma Esther Andrade

Ms. Norma Esther Andrade was born on January 7th 1961 in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. She and her siblings were raised by their mother, who could not afford to pay for Ms. Norma Esther Andrade's education. So, to pursue her dream of becoming a mathematics teacher, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade worked tirelessly in a factory, a *maquila*, in Ciudad Juarez while studying. Her first employment as an educator was at The National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) and later at the *maquila* (factory) ONEYTA where she as a teacher taught adults to read and write. Finally, she graduated and became an elementary school teacher. She worked as an elementary school teacher for more than 28 years; she loved her work.

However, in February 2001, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade's 17-year-old daughter, Lilia Alejandra, disappeared after a shift at work. A mother of two small children, one 1,5-year-old and one five-month-old. She was found brutally murdered a few days later. This changed Ms. Norma Esther Andrade's life and took her on the path of becoming an activist. In 2002, she co-founded the non-profit organization "Our Daughters Return Home, "*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa.*" The organization was composed of mothers, family members and friends of women who had been murdered in Ciudad Juarez. Since 1993, more than 400 women had disappeared in the City of Juarez, and the organization's aim was to put pressure on the Mexican government to fight impunity, solve female homicides and counteract the prevalence of *femicide*.

Overall, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade has been involved in numerous activities to advocate women's rights. For example, she has been part of organizing annual national marches on Women's Day. She has participated in hundreds of forums, workshops, and public events, both in Mexico and abroad. Furthermore, she has been one of the most prominent figures of the "Not one more," *Ni Una Más*, social movement, created and led by Susana Chavéz, who was assassinated in Mexico in January 2011. Ms. Norma Esther Andrade has dedicated hours to learning about Mexican law and collaborated with lawyers, legislators, and mothers to reform the legislation on *femicide* in Mexico.

One of Ms. Norma Esther Andrade's greatest achievements was her involvement in the infamous "Cotton Field" cases together with lawyers from the organization *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*. In November 2001, the bodies of eight young women who had been brutally assassinated and tortured were found in a cotton field, in Ciudad Juarez. She was prominent in presenting the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2002, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in 2007. In 2009, the Inter-American Court ruled that the murders of the eight women constituted an infringement on the right to life, integrity, and personal freedom. It was stated that the Mexican government had violated the right to access justice and judicial protection of the victims' families.

For the first time, the government of Mexico was publicly and internationally condemned and obliged to act. This was recognized as a breakthrough in advancing the cause of *femicides* in Mexico. Ms. Andrade played a historical role in the codification of *femicide*, which is now included in the Mexican Federal Penal Code, under Article 325.

Following the victory in the "Cotton Field" cases, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade continued the important work of campaigning for justice together with other mothers.

Ms. Norma Esther Andrade and her husband José took custody of their grandchildren, her daughter Lilia Alejandra's children, and she became a mother "again" by the age of 40. Her husband then died in 2003 and economic restraints hit the family as Ms. Norma Esther Andrade had to support the family working as a school teacher and continue her important work advocating for women's rights. She had to pay a high price for bringing awareness and helping other mothers.

In 2010, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade lost her mother. The family have lived under constant threats. In 2011, she was shot with five bullets in her home in Ciudad Juárez by an unknown assailant, a severe attack as she could have died. This horrendous event triggered Ms. Norma Esther Andrade to flee to Mexico City, which secret location was supposed to be known only to federal and state officials. However, two months later, while taking her granddaughter to school, she was again attacked by an unidentified man who gashed her face with a knife. Ever since, she lives in an undisclosed location under police protection. Her forced displacement from her home city, Ciudad Juarez, is a heavy burden that Ms. Norma Esther Andrade has to live with every day.

This kind of threats is common, not only to Ms. Norma Esther Andrade but to many other women in Mexico. Her other daughter, Malu, received a death threat in 2011 and her house was burnt down. The threats have been rather constant for almost two decades, and several of her close friends and colleagues in the organization *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* have been murdered. At times, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade, as many of her activist colleagues, receive more than 30 suspicious phone calls per day. Her office has been broken into many times and she is followed by "pick-up" cars, black cars, making her fear for life, in particular between 2001 and 2013.

Throughout the years, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade has worked in close collaboration with Amnesty International, the UN, and human rights commissions to bring the case of *femicides* to a federal level. In 2003, she was recognized by Amnesty International for her sustained work against impunity in Mexico.

The investigation of her daughter's case is now in a final stage at the Interamerican Court of Human Rights, despite the fact that the State Government of Chihuahua had arrested and convicted a suspect in 2018, and thereby declared the case solved.

Ms. Norma Esther Andrade has throughout the years helped dozens of mothers to raise their legal cases and their work contributed to change the current legislation on *femicides* in Mexico. She has met with four presidents of the Republic of Mexico, and four governors of Chihuahua to demand the creation of institutions with the ambition to improve the protection of women against violence. Her efforts, together with many other women organizations, feminists and academics contributed to new institutions in the country to better protect women, such as FEVIMTRA (Special Prosecutor for Crimes of Violence against Women and Human Trafficking) and CONAVIM (National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women) under the presidency of Vicente Fox (2000-2006).

Nevertheless, [the Chihuahua declaration](#) many considers to be a cover-up for large-scale institutionalized crimes for decades, which is right in the core of Ms. Norma Esther Andrade's campaigning for justice. The murder of women in Juárez has attracted global attention since 1993, given suspected police and government inaction to prevent the murders and bring perpetrators to justice. Police and government officials have been accused of responding with indifference to the crimes against women as well as exhibiting tolerance for such crimes, conducting inadequate and negligent investigations, ineffectively responding to the crimes, and failing to prevent and protect women from violence.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), the national statistics agency's, report on August 31st this year concluded that on average, some ten women are killed every day and tens of thousands are missing. Further, it is estimated that more than 70% of 50.5 million women and

girls aged over 15 have experienced some kind of violence, up four percentage points from the last time it ran the survey in 2016, according to Reuters.

In an article in [Los Angeles Times](#) on March 3rd 2020, Human Rights Watch stated:

“Despite longstanding efforts by activists for government to stem these killings, the number of femicides has grown 137 percent over the past five years, according to the country’s National Prosecutor...Human rights activists in Mexico have long pushed the government to address these killings...In 2019, the authorities reported 1,006 femicides, around a quarter of all women murdered that year. Women’s rights group say this number is likely underreported, since many state and local authorities are unable or unwilling to recognize when gender played a factor in a murder, leading many femicides to be reported under the more widely recognized definition of homicide, which doesn’t identify gender as a motivating factor. Mexico is facing an overall skyrocketing levels of violence and near-total impunity.”

Today, Ms. Norma Esther Andrade works for the organization “Grupo de Acción por los Derechos Humanos y la Justicia Social” and help young girls and boys to prevent violence against women. She is fully dedicating her time as an activists, risking her life everyday.

The Edelstam Prize

The Edelstam Prize is a Sweden-based international monetary award, administrated by the Harald Edelstam Foundation. The Edelstam Prize is awarded for outstanding contributions and exceptional courage in standing up for one’s beliefs in the Defence of Human Rights.

The Edelstam Prize is named after, and awarded in the memory of, the Swedish diplomat and Ambassador, Harald Edelstam (1913-1989). Harald Edelstam distinguished himself as diplomat by his professional competence, his bravery and his civic courage in the fight for Human Rights. He was an early proponent and symbol of what is today known as the “Responsibility to Protect” and his memorable acts contributed to save more than a thousand lives.

The winner of the Edelstam Prize can be a private person or a person who serves in Government, international or national organisations. The winner shall be an individual who has acted in Ambassador Harald Edelstam’s spirit in a country/countries where Human Rights, according to international law, have been violated. The laureate must have shown outstanding capabilities in analysing and handling complex situations and in finding ways, even unconventional and creative ones, to defend Human Rights. The candidate has, presumably in a complex situation, been able to take a decisive role in helping threatened people or directly saving human lives. Civic courage is a central parameter in the selection of the successful candidate.

For further information, please contact:

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