

ART FESTIVAL: TIMES ARE CHANGING IN MEXICAN JUAREZ



The Mexican city of Juarez bears a terrifying reputation of one of the most dangerous cities in the world, declared warzones excluding. The cartel wars took thousands of lives yet now, the city fights back.

The city with the worst reputation, hamlet of terror, Mad Max place...there are many names which refer to the Mexican crime-ridden Ciudad Juarez. Drug cartels have been fighting mercilessly claiming thousands of lives. In fact, since the beginning of 2008, a shocking 8.900 people have been killed here. Violence committed on women is also appallingly high.

While the cartels fight, the officials have decided to act. **The last six months have brought significant changes for the better here and while the safety record is improving, the city wishes to make a public statement to say it is becoming safe.** The Juarez Competitiva is an art festival which aims to celebrate the recent decrease in violence.

The project was inspired by a similar initiative in Mexican Tijuana. Here, violence became a massive issue as well and luckily, local officials managed to turn the story upside down. **Similarly, Juarez organizes a 16-day festival which features world famous speakers** (former NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani, or former Soviet Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev) **as well as a string of concerts, ballet performances and other cultural events.** The festival is currently taking place.

While the organizers' efforts are intense, critics point out that not only many of the CEO's and invited speakers have not been named - for safety reasons - but also, they are not required to stay the night. Many will transfer to El Paso in Texas. Such approach is slightly on the damaging side, according to critics.

On the other hand, the city has indeed lots to celebrate. The new Police Chief Julian Leyzaola has managed to purge the police of corrupt officers and his results speak for themselves: crime rate has dropped by an impressive 50% in six months.

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