

Family Stories: Irma Carrillo Nevares

Irma Carrillo Nevares has been searching for her daughter Yadira and her son Julio since 1999, when they disappeared while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border through Southern Arizona. Irma filed a case with Colibrí in 2016 and sampled her DNA that same year. She is an active member of Colibrí's Family Network group in Phoenix, Arizona. She gave the following testimony while participating in a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in October 2018.



Irma sharing her testimony in the hearing, holding a drawing of her heart where Julio and Yadira once were.

I am grateful to be here to share my testimony. My name is Irma Carrillo, and I am from Mexico. Twenty years ago, I lost two of my children, a daughter and a son, 27 and 24 years old, as they crossed the border to this country. To this day, I still don't know what happened to them. Before my children disappeared, just three weeks before, I also had lost my husband. We're a smaller family now — my two living children and me, and my grandson [Yadira's son] who is 24.

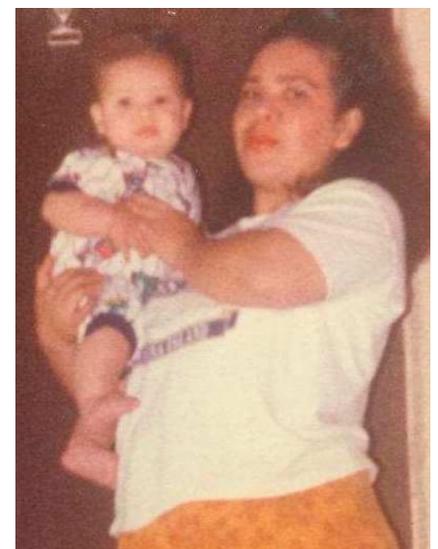
I am here today because I have so many questions and so much anguish. I have been living in torture for nearly twenty years. I have searched everywhere for my children. I have been told that they were last seen

on land belonging to a military base near Yuma, Arizona. But they vanished, they disappeared. I have searched in so many places to find out what happened to them, but we've never found a trace, nothing.

I am very ill. The loss of my children has caused chronic health problems. I don't know how long I may live, but I am going to search for my children until my dying day. And I truly need an answer to be able to be at peace. Because this grief destroys your life. I have my grandson, because my daughter left him with me when he was five years old. He has been my motivation to stay alive. My greatest hope as a grandmother—what I wish more than anything that I can one day say to my grandson, is: "Here is your mother; I can die in peace, because she is here."



Julio Gálvez Carrillo, Irma's son



Yadira Gálvez Carrillo, Irma's daughter

This is deeply painful for me and for all of those whose children have disappeared. It is worse than if they had died — there is no grave where we can go to lay flowers, or even to cry.

Sometimes I hear people say, “Well, they’re delinquents who broke a law. That’s why they died in the desert.” Some have even said that to my face. But my children were not delinquents. My son came to save money to finish law school, and my daughter, whose son is an American citizen, wanted to be able to be with him as he grew up, to raise him in a loving home. So maybe they broke a law. But what a cruel fate that they were punished with the death penalty.



Irma (3rd from left) and other members of the Family Network from across the U.S. gather before the hearing



Irma (5th from left) with other families in the Phoenix Family Network group searching for their disappeared loved ones

But, I understand that you can offer a lot of help to us. At the time they went missing, those were the old days. Today, there is a lot of technology available that could help to find them. So I ask of you, and I appeal to your hearts as fathers and mothers, that you help us. Because I speak not only for myself. I am speaking for the thousands of women and the thousands of men who are fathers and mothers, who have lost their children, who could not sit before you today as I am now, expressing to you my grief.

We shouldn't be seen as news stories or statistics, as many people reduce us to. We are real people, and we are suffering. We need you to see us and our predicament with the seriousness and compassion it and we deserve. We know that you can help us. I came today in the hopes that I would be heard. But words cannot adequately express the pain of a mother whose children have disappeared. **So today I ask you: remember my heart.**

Your support helps Colibrí reunite families like Irma's and build community, resilience, and healing among the thousands of families searching for loved ones who disappeared on the border.