

Mexico City, Nov 8 (AP) - A Mexican judge ordered seven soldiers to stand trial in the killing of suspected gang members after they were subdued, the latest chapter in the government's tardy recognition that executions occurred at a grain warehouse in southern Mexico on June 30. The charges did little to resolve the mystery of how many of the 22 purported gang members killed that day after a gunbattle were executed by soldiers and how many soldiers were actually involved.

The Federal Judiciary Council said Friday that a judge ruled there is sufficient evidence to try all seven soldiers on charges of "actions improper to public service." Three of the soldiers also face charges of aggravated homicide, abuse of authority, and altering a crime scene. The council said one of the seven, apparently the lieutenant who commanded the squad, would also be tried on charges of failing to stop a crime or covering it up.

The army originally said all 22 suspects died in a gunbattle with troops, while only one soldier was wounded. Just days afterward, The Associated Press reported on evidence at the crime scene indicating some people had been executed.

A witness later said 21 of the dead had been shot after they surrendered.

The governmental National Human Rights commission said in a report in October that 15 were probably executed and that five or more soldiers appeared to have directly participated in the killings. Prosecutors have said it was only three soldiers, those charged with homicide, but the commission's report said some of the suspects were beaten before they were killed, bringing into question how only three soldiers could have simultaneously detained, beaten and executed so many suspects.

The commission also found that someone, probably soldiers, moved the bodies in the warehouse, altered the crime scene and planted guns next to some of the corpses.

Attorney General Jesus Murillo Karam has said that only eight people were executed and that the others died in two gunfights with troops.

But the rights commission said more soldiers should be investigated beyond the eight charged, and cited statements from witnesses who said another military man, possibly a higher-ranking officer, participated in the killings.

Mexico's Defense Department said Thursday that it would obey the commission's recommendation that the army investigate further, compensate relatives of the victims and do more to train soldiers to avoid such killings and ensure military personnel don't alter crime scenes.

Late Thursday, the government of the State of Mexico, where the killings occurred, said it would also accept the commission's recommendation that it investigate alleged misconduct by state prosecutors and other officials.

The commission's report said state prosecutors tortured two female witnesses, who remain in prison on weapons charges.