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Suspects in Baja California Tourist Murders Transferred to High-Security Prison Over Cartel Ties

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– Categories: Crime



Two men accused of murdering Australian brothers Jake and Callum Robinson and their American friend Carter Rhoad during a road trip in northern Mexico have been transferred to a maximum-security prison, with newly released court documents linking them to one of Mexico's most violent drug cartels. The documents confirm for the first time that the suspects are believed to be connected to the *Sinaloa Cartel*, a criminal group designated a terrorist organization by the Trump administration earlier this year.

The victims, all experienced surfers, were killed in April while camping in Baja California, a region notorious for cartel violence. Initially, local officials claimed it was a robbery gone wrong, but the recent court revelations paint a darker picture. According to the documents, suspects Jesús Gerardo and Irineo Francisco were moved from a local facility in Ensenada to the high-security “El Hongo” prison after authorities deemed them a security threat. The prison, located over 100 kilometers away in the desert, houses Mexico’s most dangerous inmates.

Court records describe the suspects as exhibiting high aggression, emotional detachment, and a strong affiliation with organized crime. One of them allegedly boasted in prison that he could escape whenever he chose, and was found participating in drug activity within the facility, further raising concerns about their influence and risk to others.

Jake, 31, and Callum, 32, were reported missing along with 33-year-old Carter Rhoad after failing to check into their Airbnb. Their charred vehicle was later found abandoned and stripped of its tires. Their bodies were discovered dumped in a well, each shot execution-style in the head. The well also contained the body of a local farmer, hinting at a broader pattern of violence in the area.

Although authorities insisted early on that there was no cartel involvement, former Ensenada police director Jesús Luna Lezama told the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC) that the killings bore the “hallmarks of organized crime.” He said what may have started as vehicle theft escalated into forced disappearance and murder, a shift in behavior consistent with cartel-affiliated gangs.

Prosecutor Miguel Ángel Gaxiola Rodríguez maintains that the motive was to steal the victims’ tires, but with mounting evidence of cartel links, calls are growing for federal authorities to take over the case.

Four people are now facing charges, including aggravated homicide, robbery, and forced disappearance. One of the suspects, known by the nickname “El Kekas,” allegedly confessed to his then-girlfriend shortly after the killings, saying, “I f****d up three gringos.”

Experts warn that cartel groups like the *Sinaloa Cartel* operate far beyond drug trafficking, engaging in arms trading, extortion, and human smuggling. Organized crime researcher Zulia Orozco said the group typically avoids foreign victims, but stressed that Baja California remains a “lawless” zone where locals and visitors alike face real danger.

As hearings continue in Ensenada this week, the case stands as a chilling reminder of how deep cartel influence runs and how fragile law and order remain in parts of Mexico.