

Guatemala's Most Powerful Inmate Killed in Prison Riot



Guatemala City, July 20 (RHC)-- A former captain of the Guatemalan Army, Byron Lima, was killed in prison Monday while serving a 20-year-prison sentence for his involvement in the 1998 assassination of Roman Catholic Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi Conedera, who led a truth commission that held the military accountable for most of the 200,000 deaths during Guatemala's military dictatorship.

Lima's death was due to a fragmentation grenade and gunshots during a riot in the prison of Pavon, which killed at least two other inmates and wounded dozens more, according to a fireman interviewed by local media. The prison authorities have not yet given an account of the total death toll.

International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala member, Ivan Velázquez, said that Byron Lima was "a very powerful prisoner. He controlled the prison where he resided, could have transferred whoever he wished."

Gerardi was found bludgeoned to death April 26, 1998, two days after releasing the report compiled by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, as many officials remained unwilling to confront the events of the 36-year war, which ended in December 1996. The case was delayed for three years as prosecutors, witnesses and a judge fled the country because of death threats.

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