

El Salvador Finally Paves Way to Justice for Civil War Victims



San Salvador, July 20 (RHC)-- For more than 20 years, El Salvador's amnesty law has shielded perpetrators of grave human rights abuses committed during the U.S.-backed civil war. Now, in an historic step toward justice for the victims of El Salvador's bloody U.S.-backed civil war in the 1980s, the Central American country's Supreme Court has now declared unconstitutional a controversial amnesty law that has long protected the perpetrators of decades-old abuses.

The General Amnesty Law was signed in 1993, one year after the peace accords brought to an end 12 years of civil war between the Salvadoran military government and rebels of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, or FMLN, now the ruling party. The law banned investigations of crimes against humanity committed in the conflict that resulted in the deaths and disappearance of more than 80,000 people, mostly at the hands of U.S.-backed state forces.

After more than two decades of amnesty, the Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the law violates the right to justice enshrined in the Salvadoran Constitution and defies several international conventions on human, civic, and political rights. The decision also confirmed that the amnesty law was not part of the peace agreements, contrary to what right-wing groups have claimed over the years.

El Salvador's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, based on over 22,000 witness statements, found that the state committed 85 percent of abuses during the civil war, mostly in rural areas. Paramilitaries were found responsible for 10 percent of all acts of violence and the FMLN for five percent. The report

also identified individuals it accused of serious violations of human rights, including torture.

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