

New Maneuvers by Former Guatemalan Dictator Rios Montt to Evade Justice



Attempts to bring former Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt to justice are like something out of a comedy sketch, in a country where the judicial system is not exempt from looming corruption scandals and institutional crisis.

Despite well-documented evidence about the bombings and the extermination of entire Mayan communities during his dictatorship from 1982 to 1983, Rios Montt's defense team has managed, thus far, to prevent justice from being served, usually with the help of corrupt justices.

The latest maneuver was a medical report, according to which Ríos Montt is mentally 'deranged'. He has been declared incapable of facing a criminal process or even understanding the charges brought against him.

The truth is that Ríos Montt is faking mental illness, trying hard to evade responsibility for the countless war crimes perpetrated by the army during his dictatorship, particularly the killing of 1,771 indigenous Ixils in his 'scorched earth' campaign, aimed at wiping out support for leftist guerrillas.

According to parallel investigations into those bloody events, conducted by the UN and the Catholic Church, tens of thousands of people were killed or forced to flee and seek refuge either in the country's mountain region or on the other side of the common border with Mexico.

In his capacity as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, Ríos Montt is the main person responsible for those crimes. Although he was properly tried and convicted, Judge Carol Patricia Flores, who is now being investigated for illicit enrichment, annulled the sentence back in 2013 and set him free. The former Guatemalan dictator is now to face a new trial.

This past week, the new justices in the case rejected the 'deranged mental condition' and ruled that the former general should be admitted in a mental hospital for further tests, which his legal team rejects categorically.

Meanwhile, time goes by and the victims of the former dictator rightly fear that justice won't be served in one of the longest, bloodiest armed conflicts in our region, specially as Ríos Montt is 89 years old.

Between 1960 and 1996, nearly 200 thousand people were killed and another 50 thousand went missing in Guatemala. And to this date, the State has done absolutely nothing to identify those responsible and bring them to justice. Today, almost 20 years later, the whereabouts of the victims and the eventual circumstances of their death remain a mystery.

No doubt, the lack of justice is the main reason why the wounds of the armed conflict remain open and bleeding, and violence still reigns in the Central American country.

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