

Former Guatemala president sentenced to 80 years in prison

Mary Jo McConahay | May. 11, 2013
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Judges declared former Guatemala President Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity in a courtroom of tearful survivors who greeted the verdict with cries of "Justice!"

Ríos Montt was sentenced to 50 years in prison for genocide, and an additional 30 years for crimes against humanity.

The process has been the world's first in which a former head of state was brought to trial on the genocide charge in the courts of the country where crimes were committed, not an international tribunal.

"I am thinking of my mother," said a weeping woman who lost more than six family members during the army's scorched earth attacks on villages in the Maya Ixil highland region. "He gave the orders. We have justice."

Judge Jazmín Barrios called in security reinforcements to "prevent the escape" of Ríos Montt, and restore order around the defense table which broke in the crush of media attempting to record the general, who stood and spoke to cameras.

Observers following international jurisprudence say the trial's successful completion is likely to argue for prosecution of war crimes, not amnesty in countries making a transition to democracy.

Ríos Montt, who presided over the government and military during an especially bloody period of internal conflict in 1982 and 1983. Co-defendant Gen. Mauricio Rodríguez, 67, Ríos' former chief of military intelligence, was absolved of charges and freed. When security officers controlled the defense area, Ríos Montt was taken away.

Beginning March 19, more than 100 witnesses recounted horrific scenes of torture, murder, sexual violence, and forced displacement in mountainous wildlands eating grass and hiding from government helicopters.

On April 18, a series of defense team maneuvers, including in other courts, generated legal fits and starts that threatened to bury the trial completely. On Tuesday, when the defense again failed to produce promised witnesses and requested another delay, Judge Barrios effectively declared time was up and called for closing arguments.

Read more about the trial [here](#) [1]. Updates on NCRonline.org on Monday.

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