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Guatemala ex-dictator's genocide conviction overturned

Dennis Coday | May. 21, 2013

The Associated Press is reporting that Guatemala's top court has thrown another curve into the genocide case of former dictator Efrain Rios Montt, overturning his conviction and ordering that the trial be taken back to the middle of the proceedings.

Here's the story from Catholic News Service:

Guatemalan court annuls conviction of former dictator

GUATEMALA CITY -- Guatemala's highest court has annulled the conviction of a former dictator found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The constitutional court threw out the May 10 ruling against Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, 86, who had been sentenced to 80 years in prison. He had been charged with initiating a policy of extermination of Ixil Maya Indians for their reputed ties to Marxist guerrillas. The ruling was seen as historic in a country known for its impunity.

The five-judge constitutional court panel ruled May 20 that the trial should have been halted April 19 during a series of challenges by lawyer Francisco García, who was expelled earlier for trying to have judges dismissed for bias.

In a 3-2 ruling, the constitutional court said anything presented in the trial before April 19 could stand, but anything introduced or argued after that date would need to be presented again.

Ríos Montt became de facto president after leading a coup in March 1982. Another coup brought his government to an abrupt end in August 1983. The trial was focused on the killings of more than 1,700 Ixil Maya people.

Ríos Montt's co-defendant, former intelligence chief Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, was acquitted.

Guatemala's 36 years of civil war left an estimated 200,000 dead and 45,000 missing when it ended in 1996.

Church officials in Guatemala have been largely quiet since the conviction and court-ordered retrial.

Archbishop Oscar Vian Morales of Guatemala City made no reference to the May 10 ruling in his Sunday Mass two days later. He also did not meet with reporters who waited for him for a statement at the end of the celebration, Guatemalan press reported.

Neither the Guatemala archdiocese's website nor its Facebook page referred to the sentence against Ríos Montt, who on May 13 was taken to a hospital after fainting while being taken from the jail to court to hear details of

the sentence.

The Guatemalan bishops' conference also has not issued any statement about the case.

Read more on this development. [1]

Read NCR's story about Rios Montt's conviction. [2]

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