

Guatemalan Ex-Dictator Sent for Testing, Genocide Trial Stalls



Guatemala, July 24 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The trial of former Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt has once again been postponed after a court ordered for the 89-year-old retired general to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital for observation on Thursday, as the retrial got underway following months of delays.

Defense lawyers recently presented a report declaring Ríos Montt mentally unfit to face trial, saying he is not capable of comprehending the charges against him or of defending himself.

Despite the report, the retrial began on Thursday morning with Ríos Montt joining by video conference from bed in his home.

The court said its ruling to send Ríos Montt for nine days for psychiatric and physical testing aims to protect his health and responds to an attorney general's office request as well as the National Institute of Forensic Sciences' findings on his mental state.

Medical evaluation will include a probe into the psychiatric medication prescribed to Ríos Montt to ensure it corresponds with his claimed condition.

Questions have been raised about whether Ríos Montt's unresponsiveness was a result of his health state or the medication. A lawyers representing victims of the conflict expressed doubts, saying the

defense's desire to permanently stall the trial has already been made clear, AP reported.

During Thursday's ten-hour court hearing, delayed by several recesses due to problems with Rios Montt's video connection, the accusation pressed for urgency in moving the trial forward while the defense continued its repeated strategy of appeals aimed at stalling the process.

The retrial was intended to begin in January, but a series of procedural setbacks and defense tactics have posed major setbacks to the process getting underway. Rios Montt's admittance to a psychiatric hospital will once again delay the trial. One of the defense lawyers said the order to place Rios Montt under further medical and psychiatric examination constitutes a violation of his client's human rights.

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