

# *Top Guatemala Aide Linked to Genocide Enjoys Immunity*

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Guatemala City, January 29 (RHC-teleSUR) -- A top presidential advisor in Guatemala accused of dictatorship-era crimes and human rights abuses will continue to enjoy immunity from trial as the Supreme Court ruled Thursday not to grant prosecutors' request to strip his immunity.

Edgar Ovalle Maldonado is a member of congress, former military officer and right-hand man to the newly-inaugurated President Jimmy Morales, and is considered one of the key strategists that helped bring him to power. Prosecutors called for Ovalle's immunity to be removed earlier this month, which will open him up to prosecution for overseeing grave human rights violations during the country's 36-year brutal civil war.

But the Supreme Court rejected the request on the basis that there was insufficient evidence to support the allegations.

Ovalle was a high-ranking general in Guatemala's predominantly Indigenous Quiche region and has been linked to human rights violations and forced disappearances during one of the most brutal periods of genocide in the early 1980's.

According to declassified documents from the National Security Archive, the country's military regime carried out 77 massacres in Quiche in just one year between 1981 and 1982 when Ovalle headed the

specialized military unit in the region.

The call to strip Ovalle's immunity came alongside the arrest of 18 former military officials accused of being involved in one of the largest cases of forced disappearance in Latin America, near Guatemala's Creompaz military base.

Both Ovalle and the other military detainees were identified by the Attorney General's office as part of the top military brass in the in Coban, home to a former military base where remains of 558 victims were recovered in a clandestine mass grave.

As solidarity activist and non-practicing lawyer Grahame Russell, director of Rights Action, told teleSUR English after the arrests the prosecution of the military officers will likely become an important symbol of justice by finally bringing more war criminals to trial.

Human rights defenders have repeatedly voiced concern over the historiclack of punishment for perpetrators of war crimes, stressing the urgent need for justice to be brought to the thousands of victims of civil war and genocidal violence.

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