

Guatemala Crimes Against Humanity Trial Takes a Historic Step



Guatemala City, June 8 (RHC)-- In an historic step toward justice for victims of civil war violence, a Guatemalan court sent eight former dictatorship-era military officers to trial on Tuesday for crimes against humanity and enforced disappearances carried out under the Central American country's brutal U.S.-backed military regimes.

The case concerns hundreds of abuses committed at the former military base, now known as Creompaz, in the northern department of Alta Verapaz, where the military detained, tortured, and killed targets of the regime's bloody counterinsurgency strategy, particularly in the 1980's during the conflict's bloodiest years.

The crimes include the massacre of over 550 Mayan Indigenous people near the Creompaz, exhumed by forensic experts from dozens of mass graves surrounding the base. At least 90 of the remains belong to minors, according to the Attorney General's office.

A preliminary evidence trial was launched over a month ago to decide whether to make the former officers in question face a public trial. The Attorney General's office presented the specific charges leveled against each of the accused, as well as evidence in the case. Judges decided Tuesday to send

eight out of 10 former officers in question to trial.

The trial is now set to move forward with the next hearing scheduled for next Tuesday. Judge Jasmin Barrios, who presided over the genocide trial against former dictator Efraim Rios Montt in 2013, will oversee the case. Rios Montt's genocide verdict was overturned just ten days after being handed down in 2013, and his retrial continues to be drawn out by chronic delays.

Among the eight officers being sent to trial are former Army Chief of Staff and brother of a former president Manuel Benedicto Lucas Garcia, former Interior Minister Byron Barrientos Diaz, and former intelligence agent Cesar Augusto Cabrera Mejia. The latter was favored to become President Jimmy Morales' Minister of the Interior prior to his arrest alongside over a dozen other former military men in January.

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