

Rights Action
April 11, 2013

GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT, OTTO MOLINA PEREZ, NAMED AS INTELLECTUAL AUTHOR OF GENOCIDE

BELOW

- Associated Press: "GUATEMALA WAR TRIAL PUTS PAST CLOSER TO PRESIDENT"
- Reuters: "WITNESS AT EX-DICTATOR'S TRIAL LINKS GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT TO WAR CRIMES"

Rights Action COMMENTARY

- GENOCIDE DENIER: Guatemalan president, and former General, Otto Perez Molina, is the equivalent of a "holocaust denier", stating that there was no genocide in Guatemala, let alone a US-backed "scorched- earth" military campaign of burning villages to the ground and killing everyone found in sight – babies to the elderly, boys and girls, women and men.
- NORTH AMERICAN COMPLICITY AND SILENCE: Not only did successive US governments fund, train, arm and operate directly with the genocidal regimes, through the worst years of State repression and genocide – 1970s to early 1990s -, but, most recently, on September 24, 2012, former US President Clinton gave General Otto Perez Molina a special recognition award at a United Nations ceremony in New York City.
- GOLD AND THE GENOCIDAL GENERALS: Since the 1990s, North American mining companies – Goldcorp Inc, Tahoe Resources, Hudbay Minerals, Radius Gold, KCA Associates – have maintained direct business and political dealings, first with Efraim Rios Montt (the general now on trial for genocide who was, for years, president of the Guatemala Congress and leader of the former ruling FRG party) and now with Otto Perez Molina (the general who is also an intellectual and material author of the State repression and genocide in the 1980s, but who – as president – has immunity from prosecution).

COMMENTS / QUESTIONS: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org

WHAT TO DO & HOW TO GET INVOLVED: See below

~ Please "share" and re-post this information ~

GUATEMALA WAR TRIAL PUTS PAST CLOSER TO PRESIDENT

April 9, 2013, by Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemala's struggle to deal with the war crimes of the past, including bringing an aging former dictator and his officers to justice, is hitting the country's current leader.

A former soldier testifying at the genocide trial of ex-strongman Efraim Rios Montt, now 86, directly accused President Otto Perez Molina of ordering pillaging and executions during the 36-year civil war, which killed a total of 200,000 [and disappeared an estimated 50,000 more. – Rights Action edit]

Rumors and accusations had surfaced about Perez before, but without proof or formal charges. He has called Thursday's testimony "lies." But the testimony continues to shake the country, days after Hugo Reyes told a stunned courtroom: "The soldiers, on orders from Major 'Tito Arias,' better known as Otto Perez Molina ... coordinated the burning and looting, in order to later execute people."

Prosecutor Orlando Lopez said Reyes' testimony is 100 percent credible, but he has to study the accusations before he can say whether they would result in criminal action. "Right now I'm focused on the Rios Montt case," Lopez said Monday. "I don't know what will happen after that."

Reyes, 47, a protected witness testifying by video from an undisclosed location, said he arrived in September 1982 to Nebaj in the western state of Quiche as a military mechanic assigned to team of engineers. He knew the commanders, including Perez, because they also were in charge of the engineering unit. He told the court that Perez, then an army major, ordered soldiers to burn and pillage the area, an Ixil stronghold.

When Reyes used the nickname "Tito Arias," some in the courtroom gasped, recognizing Perez's *nomme de guerre*, which Perez himself acknowledged in a 2000 newspaper opinion column. In the same column, Perez wrote that he was assigned to Nebaj in July of 1982.

But Perez said he researched Reyes' record with the Defense Ministry and that he didn't arrive until November 1983, after Perez had left. "I have nothing to hide. I did not participate in a single situation where someone died that was my responsibility," Perez told reporters on Friday. "I'm not going to deny that I was in Nebaj; it's true. But I was there to rescue the civilians, combat the armed guerrillas and help the civilians."

A U.N. truth commission said state forces and related paramilitary groups were responsible for 93 percent of the killings and human rights violations that it documented, committed mostly against indigenous Maya. Yet until now, only low or middle-level officials have been prosecuted for a war that ended in 1996.

Rios Montt is the biggest by far, on trial along with his former head of intelligence, Jose Sanchez, in connection with the deaths of 1,771 Mayan Indians during the military dictatorship he headed from March 23, 1982, to Aug. 8, 1983, during which he led a U.S.-backed counterinsurgency against guerrillas.

Perez, who retired as a general, made his military career as an intelligence specialist, one of the most influential sections of the army. He helped negotiate the 1996 peace accords and emerged as one of the moderate military leaders. He easily won the presidency in late 2011 from voters tired of the lack of law and order in a country run by gangs and drug traffickers, and has long insisted there was no genocide.

His election more than a year ago was criticized at the time as a return to the military rule of Guatemala's past. But Perez has since been credited with not standing in the way of efforts to prosecute accused leaders such as Rios Montt, the first former president in Latin America to be tried on genocide charges.

But now the testimony is leading to him.

"This is the second time the name of Otto Perez Molina has come up in the courts," Guatemalan Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Menchu said Monday, noting that the first time was in a Spanish National Court in another case against Rios Montt. "It's important that the courts see all the evidence, judge the reality and determine what happened ... that the executive branch doesn't interfere just because the president is linked to the process."

Perez wrote in a 2000 opinion piece for the Guatemalan newspaper Prensa Libre that he used the nickname "Tito." He wrote in that column that as a major he arrived in Nebaj in 1982 and spent nearly a year there, "an experience that left an indelible fingerprint on my personal and professional life." Perez said he was the commander of a team fighting in the Ixil Triangle as part of the Task Force Gumarkaaj.

According to prosecutors, the task force acted on orders set out by military leadership, including to attack and remove "noncombatant civilian populations." Court documents say that all Maya Ixil were declared internal enemies.

Perez is also named in documents pertaining to "Operation Sofia," a report from the field to military superiors about soldiers' actions at the time. His name is handwritten on one page. The Rios Montt defense has said the documents are not original and therefore not valid evidence. The Defense Ministry said that during Rios Montt's government, Perez was an outstanding staff officer at a military institute and a battalion commander in an entirely different part of the country.

Reyes testified that soldiers tortured and executed the indigenous Ixil believed to be guerrillas. He said that women, children and the elderly were among the executed. He claimed that sometimes the soldiers would throw the victims' babies alive into the mass graves and bury them with their dead mothers.

The military offensives were part of a brutal, decades-long counterinsurgency against a leftist uprising that brought massacres in the Mayan heartland where the guerrillas were based.

Dozens of victims have testified since the trial started March 19 of surviving rapes, massacres and other atrocities.

The Rios Montt trial already is transcendental for Guatemala, said Marcie Mersky, director of the New York-based International Center for Transitional Justice. "This is the first time we have encountered a genuine trial under due process of international law," said Mersky, who is attending the proceedings. Guatemalan human rights activist Helen Mack said people need to keep in mind that this trial is against Rios Montt.

"But new information has come out, and the court needs to determine if there is sufficient evidence to open an investigation," Mack said. "They have to determine where Otto Perez Molina was in the chain of command to determine if he was effectively responsible."

WITNESS AT EX-DICTATOR'S TRIAL LINKS GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT TO WAR CRIMES

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/04/05/uk-guatemala-riosmontt-idUKBRE93401920130405>

Apr 5 2013, By [Mike McDonald](#)

GUATEMALA CITY (Reuters) - A former member of Guatemala's armed forces implicated President Otto Perez in civil war atrocities as he testified on Thursday at the genocide trial of ex-dictator Efraim Rios Montt. Hugo Reyes, who was stationed as an army engineer in a violent region of Guatemala under Rios Montt's 1982-1983 rule, said Perez commanded soldiers who burned down homes and shot and killed civilians during the civil war, which pitted leftist insurgents against a series of right-wing governments.

Perez, a retired army general who was elected president in 2011, also known as major Tito Arias during the civil war, has previously denied involvement in war crimes. Reyes, speaking to the court by video link from an undisclosed location, said he witnessed the killing of farmers on an army base near the village of Nebaj in northwestern Guatemala by troops under the command of Perez and another officer.

"The soldiers under the orders of Major Tito Arias, known as Otto Perez Molina, Francisco Marin and the officers they were in charge of, and the commander of the company of engineers, coordinated the burning (of homes) and pulling people out so they could execute them," Reyes, 47, told the court.

There were gasps in the court as he spoke, and people who had been chatting fell silent. Throughout his testimony, Reyes kept his face hidden with the peak of the baseball cap he wore.

Before Perez took office in 2012, Reuters asked him about testimony linking him to war crimes during the 1960-1996 war in which around 200,000 people died and another 45,000 disappeared. Perez said the allegations were "completely false." As president, Perez is protected by amnesty granted to public officials and cannot be subpoenaed.

Rios Montt, who left Congress last year, was ordered to stand trial in January when a judge found sufficient evidence linking him to the killing of more than 1,700 indigenous people in a counterinsurgency plan carried out under his command.

RETRIBUTION

Prosecutors allege Rios Montt turned a blind eye as soldiers used rape, torture and arson against leftist rebels and targeted indigenous people in a "scorched earth" offensive that killed at least 1,771 members of the Mayan Ixil group. Rios Montt, 86, has yet to take the stand in the trial, the first in which a country has prosecuted one of its former heads of state for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Reyes, now a mechanic, related how soldiers took kidnapped civilians to a military base where they were tortured, killed and dumped in mass graves. "Some had their tongues cut out and their fingernails removed and other injuries," he said. "The army officers said to them: 'Sons of bitches, talk or we'll cut out your tongues.'"

Many of the victims of the conflict were ethnic Maya. "Indian seen, Indian dead. That was the motto they had," said Reyes, the only former member of the armed forces prosecutors have lined up for the witness stand.

Perez, a conservative, was the first military man to take the Guatemalan presidency since the end of the war. He won election not long after Guatemala began sentencing military officials for crimes committed during the war, and human rights activists raised concerns that Perez might obstruct efforts to bring army officials to justice. Perez sought to allay those fears, and there was jubilation among victims' families when Rios Montt went to trial.

But when Reyes was asked by a lawyer working for the prosecution if he feared he had put his life in danger by testifying, he said he was afraid of retribution from Perez and his former military comrades. "I'm totally sure that they feel nothing in their soul torturing and disappearing someone," he said.

(Editing by Dave Graham and Mohammad Zargham)

RIGHTS ACTION

Rights Action's work goes back to 1983 in Guatemala. Since then, and particularly since 1995, Rights Action has been funding grassroots organizations working for community development, the environment, disaster relief, truth, memory, justice and human rights, and for democracy and peaceful resolution of conflicts in Guatemala and Honduras (and in southern Mexico and El Salvador). The Canadian Rights Action Foundation, founded in 1999, is independent from Rights Action (USA). Grahame Russell and Annie Bird are co-directors of Rights Action (USA); Grahame is director of Rights Action (Canada).

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS (in Canada and the U.S.) to support work for truth, justice and reparations in Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- CANADA: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS can be made (in Canada and U.S.):

<http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

- be a monthly credit card donor (Canada and U.S.)
- to donate stock, contact: info@rightsaction.org

UPCOMING FACT-FINDING DELEGATIONS

- Delegation to Guatemala, July 6-14, 2013: Mining injustice – versus - Community well-being, human rights & the environment
- Delegation to Honduras, July 13-21, 2013: Struggle for democracy, human rights & the environment – versus - Military-backed regime, & global companies & investors

Interested -?- Contact: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org

GET INFORMED / GET INVOLVED

- **SPEAKERS:** Contact us to plan educational presentations in your community

- JOIN A DELEGATION: Form your own group or join one of our delegation seminars to Guatemala and Honduras to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles
- RECOMMENDED DAILY NEWS: www.democracynow.org / www.therealnews.com / www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca / www.rabble.ca / www.fsrn.org /
- RECOMMENDED READING: Eduardo Galeano "Open Veins of Latin America" / Howard Zinn "A People's History of the United States" / James Loewen "Lies My Teacher Told Me" / Ronald Wright "Stolen Continents" / Naomi Klein "The Shock Doctrine" / Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who" /

- Comments / questions: info@rightsaction.org
- Get on/off Rights Action's listserv: www.rightsaction.org
- Follow Rights Action on facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org

~ Please "share" and re-post this information ~
