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Objet: Guatemalan Genocide on Trial
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Guatemalan Genocide on Trial

Court case begins today against former dictator Rios Montt

30-year struggle for justice leads to landmark prosecution

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Washington, DC, January 31, 2013 - Guatemala achieved a breakthrough for justice today with the opening of the landmark criminal trial of Efraim Rios Montt, former military dictator, for genocide and crimes against humanity. Rios Montt, along with his chief of army intelligence Jose Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez, is charged with ordering and overseeing a bloody counterinsurgency campaign during his 1982-83 regime that sought to wipe out guerrilla forces and anyone who supported them. The indictment accuses the two retired generals of responsibility for fifteen massacres in the Ixil region of the country's northwestern Quiche department, resulting in the deaths of 1,771 unarmed men, women and children.

The proceedings will begin with a review of the evidence by Judge Miguel Angel Galvez. The prosecution plans to propose 142 witnesses -- among them, relatives of victims and survivors of the massacres -- and 64 experts, including military analysts, forensic scientists, anthropologists, scholars, investigators and psychologists. Documents will include military records, counterinsurgency campaign plans, field reports sent from the killing zones to the high command, and the findings of the UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission, which in 1999 concluded that 200,000 civilians died or disappeared in the 36-year conflict. The truth commission also found that Guatemalan army, police, and paramilitary forces were responsible for 93 percent of human rights violations committed during the war.

Rios Montt was indicted for genocide in January 2012, but a flood of appeals, amnesty requests, and other delay tactics by the defense prevented the case from advancing.

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