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Indicted for Genocide: Guatemala's Efraín Ríos Montt

U.S. and Guatemalan Documents Trace Dictator's Rise to Power

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For ongoing trial summaries, commentary and analysis, see a new Website launched by the Open Society Justice Initiative in partnership with the National Security Archive, the International Center for Transitional Justice, CEJIL and the Guatemalan on-line news site Plaza Pública:

<http://www.riosmontt-trial.org/>

Washington, D.C., March 19, 2013 -- The groundbreaking genocide trial of Efraín Ríos Montt, retired army general and former dictator of Guatemala, opens today with the presentation of the prosecution's first witnesses. The trial will take place despite repeated efforts by defense lawyers to halt the proceedings with legal appeals and a bid for amnesty. On March 12, the Constitutional Court rejected the amnesty request once and for all, clearing the way for the trial to begin.

Along with his former intelligence chief, José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, Ríos Montt stands accused of masterminding a violent counterinsurgency campaign during his 1982-83 regime that sought to destroy opposing guerrilla forces and anyone who supported them. The indictment accuses the two men of responsibility for fifteen documented massacres in the Ixil region of the country's Quiché department, resulting in the deaths of 1,771 unarmed men, women and children.

Who is Efraín Ríos Montt? As the trial gets underway, the National Security Archive offers this brief biographic sketch and a description of the general's first months in power to provide background for understanding the man, his role as military dictator of Guatemala, and the crimes for which he has been indicted. The information comes not only from declassified U.S. documents released under FOIA, but from secret Guatemalan military documents obtained by the Archive through years of research on behalf of the Guatemala Documentation Project. In the coming weeks, we will offer additional analysis and documents about the Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency strategy under Ríos Montt and the impact he had among Mayan communities in the country's Ixil region

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