



El Salvador: Will General Jose Guillermo Garcia be deported?

Apr 15, 2014 By W. Alejandro Sanchez



Retired Salvadoran Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia leaves Federal Court in Palm Beach, Fla., with an unidentified member of his defense team, left, on Oct. 23, 2000. (AP Photo/Marta Lavandier)

The ruling of a Miami judge to deport Army General Jose Guillermo Garcia, a former defense minister of [El Salvador](#), serves as a victory for human rights supporters, despite the difficulties to implement the rule anytime soon.

Judge Michael Horn ruled that [Garcia](#) had a direct role in the torture and extrajudicial

killings of hundreds of individuals during that country's civil war (1980-1992).

A brief background

A brief summary of El Salvador's bloody conflict is required in order to properly understand the accusations against the retired army general.

Garcia served as defense minister of the Revolutionary Junta – a military government that ruled El Salvador from 1979 until 1982. It was during this period that a bloody civil war commenced between the government and the [Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional](#) (FMLN), a coalition of various insurgent movements. Some 75,000 thousand people are believed to have died in the conflict.

Three significant incidents that occurred at the onset of the civil war were: the 1980 assassination of [Archbishop Oscar Romero](#), the 1980 assassination of four U.S. church women, and the 1981 El Mozote Massacre.

Garcia was defense minister of the country when these crimes took place, as he served in that post from 1979 until 1983.

[The School of the Americas Watch](#) (SOAW) reports that Garcia “refused to investigate reports that hundreds of unarmed civilians were brutally murdered by the U.S.-trained Atlacatl battalion in 1981.” This incident is known as El Mozote Massacre: Salvadoran soldiers, as part of “Operacion Rescate,” killed over 800 civilians at El Mozote village, where FMLN fighters were

believed to be hiding.

Likewise, [the SOAW](#) claims that “Garcia also failed to launch a serious investigation of the murder of four U.S. churchwomen by members of the Salvadoran National Guard.” A [1998 New York Times report](#) explains that the women (Maura Clarke, Jean Donovan, Ita Ford and Dorothy Kazel) were abducted, raped and shot to death on the night of December 2, 1980; their bodies were later found alongside an isolated road.

A 1993 [United Nations Truth Commission](#) report concluded that Garcia and Coronel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who at the time was the director of the National Guard, organized an official cover-up of the nuns’ assassinations.

In 1990, Garcia travelled to the U.S. in 1989 and was granted political asylum the following year. He has reportedly lived in Florida ever since.

In February 2013, during his deportation trial, Garcia admitted that he knew of abuses committed by Salvadoran forces, but he argued that he tried to stop them. “I have never ordered, nor have I ever agreed with torture because my principles prohibit it,” he stated.

The deportation verdict

Given the atrocious human rights violations that Garcia is accused of having either ordered or covered up while he was El Salvador’s defense minister, it is no surprise that human rights organizations have praised the recent ruling.

The [Center for Justice & Accountability](#) issued a press release in which it praises the judge’s decision and the New York Time’s work to make the ruling be public knowledge. It also states that the “CJA and our clients will continue to work to obtain justice for the brutality of the Salvadoran military and security forces under Garcia’s command.” (The CJA has uploaded a PDF of the [66-page judge’s decision](#)).

The CJA has been trying to hold Garcia accountable for his actions since 1999.

In the conclusions of his lengthy decision, Judge Horn states that “the Court finds that the Department of Homeland Security has established by clear and convincing evidence that all the allegations in the charging documents are true and correct.” These are listed as Garcia’s extrajudicial killing of Archbishop Romero, the four American women, and the El Mozote Massacre, among several others. (P. 60-61)

It is well known that the U.S. government supported the Salvadoran military during the country’s civil war, and to this day the American military has a [base in Comalapa](#), El Salvador. Garcia himself received some military training by the U.S. as he attended a course on counterinsurgency at the School of the Americas in 1962.

As for the general’s fate, his lawyer has declared that they will fight the decision to extradite his client back to Central America. In other words, we will have months, if not years, of legal

proceedings before a final verdict is reached and carried out.

Thirty years ago, the atrocities committed in El Salvador's civil war were horrific, and the perpetrators should be brought to justice. By perpetrators I do not mean solely the military personnel who killed the peasants of El Mozote or four American nuns, but also the higher-ranking officers who either ordered these crimes or covered them up. Hopefully Garcia will not face the U.S. justice system but will eventually return to El Salvador to be trialed there as well for his actions.

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