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## **Guatemala: First trial of former head of state offers hope of justice**

The trial of Guatemala's ex-president General Efraín Ríos Montt and his former head of military intelligence Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez -due to start on Tuesday 19 March – marks a long-awaited opportunity for justice for the victims of crimes against humanity committed against Guatemala's Mayan communities, Amnesty International said today.

In 1999, a UN-backed truth commission found that during Guatemala's 36-year internal armed conflict (1960-1996) some 200,000 people - over 80% of whom were of Mayan descent - were killed or disappeared, and that genocide had occurred.

Montt and Sánchez, are to be tried as the intellectual authors of the killings of 1,771 individuals and the forced displacement of tens of thousands more from the Ixil triangle region of southern Quiché department.

“This moment is truly historic because it is the first time that a former head of state in Central America is to be put on trial for crimes under international law,” said Guadalupe Marengo, director of Amnesty International's Americas Programme.

“Relatives of victims have been waiting for justice for more than 30 years and it is a testament to their perseverance, along with their lawyers, that a trial which has been blocked by appeals for 11 years is finally taking place.

Despite recent efforts to strengthen justice and accountability for past abuses, the Guatemalan armed forces remain uncooperative when it comes to investigations of violations committed during the internal armed conflict.

The army has refused to cooperate with investigations into killings, enforced disappearances, the use of rape as a weapon of war, and other crimes committed during the conflict.

The failure to provide any documentation places a huge burden on families and victims seeking justice, or simply seeking to find the whereabouts of their disappeared loved ones.

“Amnesty International hopes that this trial will mark a significant step in real progress towards truth, justice and reparation for the victims and relatives of those who perished in the conflict years, so overdue for so many years,” said Marengo.

### **Background information**

You can find more context on Ríos Montt's Guatemala in the following links:

[Jean-Marie Simon: A foreign witness to Guatemala's war.](#)

[The two Guatemalas of Ríos Montt.](#)

[City of the Disappeared – three decades of searching for Guatemala's missing. :](#)

[The task of reading Guatemala's bones.](#)

[The endless search for justice in Guatemala.](#)