

Guilty! Former Members of U.S.-Trained, Armed and Funded Guatemalan Military Found Guilty of Gang-Rape And Sexual Slavery

Two former Guatemalan soldiers have been sentenced to life in prison after they were found guilty of raping women in the Sepur Zarco military base as part of the military strategy.

“[The Judge] rejected the idea that sexual violence in the military base was to satisfy the sexual desires of the soldiers, but was a weapon of war. “There was a strategic design to pulverize the social fabric ...”.



(Mayan Q'eqchi' women from Sepur Zarco, victims of rapes and sexual slavery, in court in Guatemala City.)

These precedent-setting war crimes trials for gang-rape and sexual enslavement of 11 Mayan Q'eqchi' women in the 1980s from the community of Sepur Zarco have just concluded in Guatemalan courts, as a precedent setting lawsuit works its way through Canadian courts, against Hudbay Minerals, for its responsibility for the gang rape in 2007 of 11 Mayan Q'eqchi' women from the nearby community of Lote 8.

Guatemala: Soldiers Sentenced to 240 Years for Systematic Rape

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Guatemala-Soldiers-Sentenced-to-240-Years-for-Systematic-Rape-20160226-0030.html>

The Sepur Zarco case is the first wartime sexual abuse case prosecuted in Guatemala, and the first of sexual and domestic slavery tried in a national court.

Two former Guatemalan soldiers have been sentenced to 120 and 240 years in prison after they were found guilty of raping women in the Sepur Zarco military base in the 1980s as part of a military strategy.

Coronel Esteelmer Reyes Giron and former soldier Valdez Asig were found guilty of crimes against humanity, including the enforced disappearance of seven men, and the systematic rape and enslavement of 11 women in the historic case.

This is the first case of wartime sexual abuse prosecuted in Guatemala, as well the first case of sexual and domestic slavery tried in a national court.

To a packed courtroom, including the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, Judge Jazmin Barrios said that she had found the testimonies of the women to be “completely credible.”

“We find the treatment of the women of Sepur Zarco to have been completely humiliating and degrading,” she said.

She rejected the idea that sexual violence in the military base was to satisfy the sexual desires of the soldiers, but was a weapon of war. “There was a strategic design to pulverize the social fabric and to prevent its reproductive,” she said.

The judge found that there were various inconsistencies in the testimonies of the women: that the women were not widows but that their husbands had been “disappeared,” and that the soldiers then began to systematically rape them.

Jo-Marie Burt, a trial observer with The Washington Office on Latin America, told teleSUR that the ruling was an extremely important moment for Guatemalan justice.

“The world was watching to see if in fact Guatemala could accomplish this incredible precedent, not only that it could prosecute sexual violence, but also the crime of sexual slavery internationally,” she said.

“(The ruling) is acknowledging the consequences of Guatemala’s internal conflict, addressing sexual violence and slavery, as well as homicide and enforced disappearances.”

During the ruling, Judge Barrios made reference to Dominga Coc, who was raped daily and then murdered alongside her two small daughters by a riverside.

The two accused were each handed 30 years in prison for crimes against humanity, and then 30 years for each of the seven cases of forced disappearance.

"It was a very strong statement," said Burt. "They were such strong sentences because these crimes are so heinous, so contrary to the norms of war, and to norms of humanity."

"Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu and leader Rosalina Hernandez, listen to the sentence of the Sepur Zarco judgement"

Guatemala has struggled for years with impunity for those in charge who inflicted such violence in the Central American country's civil war. Burt warned that despite the success of the Sepur Zarco case, impunity was still present.

"What's important to note however is that the defendants are mid-ranking military officers, so it's significant but they're not the head honchos, not the big fish," she added.

The historic trial, which began Feb. 1 this year, sought to prove that 11 women were victims of sexual abuse and domestic slavery in the the Sepur Zarco military base, between 1982 and 1986.

The Indigenous Q'eqchi' women were held captive as domestic slaves after their husbands were disappeared and murdered by the military.

Guatemala: Rape Sentences In Landmark Military Trial

27 February 2016

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-35674893>

A Guatemala court has sentenced two former members of the military to 360 years in jail for the murder, rape and sexual enslavement of indigenous women. Francisco Reyes Giron and Heriberto Valdez Asij were found guilty of crimes against humanity. The historic ruling is the first successful prosecution for sexual violence committed during Guatemala's military conflict in the 1980s.

There were jubilant scenes in court as the judge read out the sentence. "This is historic, it is a great step for women and above all for the victims," said Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, who attended the hearing.

Francisco Reyes Giron, who was the commander of the Sepur Zarco military base, was found guilty of holding 15 women in sexual and domestic slavery and for killing one woman and her two daughters. Heriberto Valdez Asij, a paramilitary who carried out commissions for the army, was convicted for the same enslavement, as well as the forced disappearance of seven men.

The victims have been demanding accountability for the crimes at Sepur Zarco for decades.

"We were raped, all of this happened. If it wasn't like this, where are our husbands? We don't know where they are," said Demesia Yac, 70, who acted as a representative for the women.

The court had heard harrowing details about what went on at the base in the eastern highlands during the 1980s.

According to the prosecution, in 1982 armed forces repeatedly attacked the village of Sepur Zarco and killed or took away Mayan leaders who had been applying for land titles and had angered local landowners. The men were accused of being associated with left-wing guerrillas.

Agustin Chen, one of the men who survived said the soldiers took him to a cell and beat him every day. "They killed seven people, throwing two grenades into the pit where they had put them."

The court heard how military commanders considered the women to be "available" without their men and had then taken them into sexual and domestic slavery. They were required to report every third day to the base for "shifts" during which they were raped, sexually abused, and forced to cook and clean for the soldiers.

In a report to the court, anthropologist Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj said military outposts were installed in the region "to give security to the landowner's farms and to take possession of the lands".

For some of the victims, their ordeal lasted as long as six years until the base was closed in 1988.

More Information – Sepur Zarco Trials

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Film: “Two Struggles For Justice: Sexual Violence Against Mayan Q’eqchi’ Women In Guatemala”

By ECAP (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Accion Psico-Social)

Documenting two struggles for justice by Mayan Q'eqchi' women: -1- Women from Sepur Zarco filed a criminal complaint for sexual abuse and domestic slavery suffered in an army outpost during Guatemala's state repression against its own people in the 1970-1980s; -2- Women from

Lote Ocho filed a civil lawsuit in Canada against Hudbay Minerals for gang-rapes they suffered by security agents in 2007.

- Video español: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4aOOSnJ4qo>
- Video q'eqchi'-inglés: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEoFrsAyyf8>

Book: "Clamor por la Justicia" / "Clamor for Justice"

By ECAP (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Accion Psico-Social)

Documenting the lives and stories of the women of Sepur Zarco and the women of Lote 8, all victims of gang-rapes, all involved in courageous struggles for truth and justice.

- Spanish version:
http://ecapguatemala.org.gt/sites/default/files/Clamor%20por%20la%20justicia%20version%20final_1.pdf
- English version: available on request

Tax Deductible Donations in U.S. and Canada

To support the struggle of the Mayan Q'eqchi' women of Lote 8 to rebuild their lives and community, and to seek justice in Canada for the rapes they suffered, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations:

- Canada: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/rights-action/>
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