



THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Bringing Human Rights Abusers To Justice.

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lisa Cohen
(310) 395-2544 / lisa@lisacohen.org

JUDGE ALLOWS TORTURE AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING CLAIMS TO PROCEED AGAINST FORMER COLOMBIAN MILITARY LEADER

Miami, Florida, March 15, 2023—Yesterday, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida ruled that extrajudicial killing and torture claims relating to the death of Colombian magistrate judge Carlos Horacio Urán Rojas can proceed against Luis Alfonso Plazas Vega, a former lieutenant colonel in the Colombian military now residing in Florida. The Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA) and co-counsel Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati filed the lawsuit in February 2022.

The Plaintiffs welcomed the ruling. “It is healing to have our claims be heard by the Court and we are eager to have the process move forward,” said Xiomara Urán. Helena Urán Bidegain added that “some people believe they can shirk their responsibilities by moving to another country. Fortunately, the United States provides us with legal tools to claim what is right: justice and for everyone to know the truth.”

The claims against Plazas Vega arise from the aftermath of the 1985 Colombian Palace of Justice siege by M-19 guerrillas. Plaintiffs allege that military forces under Plazas Vega’s leadership launched a brutal retaking of the Palace of Justice during which the military triaged, interrogated, tortured and extrajudicially killed or forcibly disappeared dozens of civilians.

Plazas Vega had moved to dismiss plaintiffs’ suit on procedural grounds – arguing that plaintiffs had failed to exhaust local remedies and that the court should abstain from addressing the suit. “Today’s ruling repudiates Plazas Vega’s initial procedural arguments and allows the case to continue, bringing our clients closer to their long-awaited opportunity at accountability,” said CJA Senior Staff Attorney Daniel McLaughlin.

For decades, families of those killed or disappeared during the Palace of Justice siege have sought justice and accountability, both in Colombia and before regional human bodies. “We are thankful for the Court’s time and attention on this matter, and this ruling marks an important step forward in our clients’ pursuit of justice for their father,” noted Luke Liss, Pro Bono Partner at Wilson Sonsini.

For more on this case, visit: www.cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/palace-of-justice/



THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Bringing Human Rights Abusers To Justice.

For a digital reconstruction of the military's retaking of the Palace of Justice, see Forensic Architecture's recent [investigation](#) for the Colombian Truth Commission.

Legal Background

CJA filed the [Urán, et al. v. Plazas Vega \(Palace of Justice\)](#) case under the Torture Victim Protection Act, a federal statute that permits civil suits in U.S. courts for claims of torture and extrajudicial killing committed under color of law.

About the Center for Justice and Accountability

The [Center for Justice and Accountability](#) (CJA) is a San Francisco-based international human rights organization dedicated to working with communities impacted by torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious human rights abuses to seek truth, justice, and redress using innovative litigation and transitional justice strategies. CJA has successfully brought cases against defendants such as one of Colombia's most violent paramilitary commanders, known as Macaco; the military officer responsible for the assassination of Chilean activist and singer Victor Jara; and Syria's Assad regime for its targeted killing of war correspondent Marie Colvin.

About Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati

For more than 60 years, [Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati](#) has offered a broad range of services and legal disciplines focused on serving the principal challenges faced by the management and boards of directors of business enterprises. The firm is nationally recognized as a leader in the fields of corporate governance and finance, mergers and acquisitions, private equity, securities litigation, employment law, intellectual property, and antitrust, among many other areas of law. With deep roots in Silicon Valley, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati has offices in Austin; Beijing; Boston; Brussels; Hong Kong; London; Los Angeles; New York; Palo Alto; San Diego; San Francisco; Seattle; Shanghai; Washington, D.C.; and Wilmington, DE.