

Former Salvadoran Military Officer Sued in the US for the Killing of Dutch Journalist

Mario Reyes Mena is sued in a Virginia federal court for the murder of Jan Kuiper, Dutch journalist killed in El Salvador in 1982

San Francisco, California, October 10, 2024 – Yesterday, October 9, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), with co-counsel Jenner & Block LLP and in collaboration with Fundación Comunicándonos and ASDEHU of El Salvador, brought suit against Col. Mario Reyes Mena for his alleged role in the killing of Jan Kuiper, one of four Dutch journalists who were ambushed and killed by members of El Salvador’s military in Chalatenango, El Salvador on March 17, 1982.

The civil complaint was filed on behalf of Jan Kuiper’s brother, Gert Kuiper, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, where Reyes Mena lives.

“The families of the four Dutch journalists have been awaiting justice for more than four decades,” said Gert Kuiper, Jan Kuiper’s younger brother. “This lawsuit gives my family a chance at accountability for my brother’s killing and to move a step closer to ending impunity for the crimes committed during the Salvadoran Civil War.”

The Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992) was marked by widespread human rights abuses. The Salvadoran military and state security forces, along with their paramilitary allies, regularly kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and carried out enforced disappearances of perceived political dissidents. The Dutch journalists were in El Salvador reporting on the civil war’s brutal impact on the lives of civilians. As alleged in the Complaint, the journalists were ambushed and killed by soldiers acting under Reyes Mena’s command while on a reporting assignment. A report issued by the United Nations Truth Commission in 1993 concluded that Col. Reyes Mena participated in the planning of the ambush of the Dutch journalists, and then soldiers acting under his command carried out the murder.

Currently, two investigations into the murders of the journalists are ongoing - one in El Salvador, one in The Netherlands. While two other former military officials allegedly involved in the killing of the Dutch journalists are detained pending prosecution in El Salvador, Col. Reyes Mena continues to live in the United States, despite a Salvadoran indictment against him and an INTERPOL Red Notice for his provisional arrest.

“The killing of the Dutch journalists was recognized by a UN-backed Truth Commission as among the most emblematic crimes committed during the civil war in El Salvador,” said CJA Senior Staff Attorney Claret Vargas. “Failure to address this historic crime has contributed to an environment in El Salvador where press freedom violations still go unpunished to this day.”

The Jenner & Block team representing Kuiper includes Jason Hipp, Co-Chair of Jenner & Block’s Human Rights and Global Strategy Practice, Partner Michelle Kallen, and Associate Zoë Reinstein.

More information on the case, including a copy of the complaint, can be found [here](#).

Information on CJA's previous efforts to seek justice through civil lawsuits for victims of the Salvadoran Civil War can be found [here](#). Information on CJA's past civil cases for violence against journalists can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

About the Center for Justice & Accountability and its Partners

[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 for the murder of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero; against Salvadoran Generals García and Vides Casanova, for their role in the torture of civilians; and Syria's Assad regime for its targeted killing of war correspondent Marie Colvin.

[Jenner & Block LLP](#) is a law firm with global reach, with offices in Century City, Chicago, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. *The American Lawyer* has recognized Jenner & Block as the number one pro bono law firm 12 times. Our Human Rights and Global Strategy Practice helps clients act as change agents while addressing a wide range of human rights issues involving corruption and rule of law, freedom of expression, supply chain standards, human trafficking and modern slavery, environmental justice, stakeholder engagement, and indigenous persons' rights.

[Fundación Comunicándonos](#) is a Salvadoran civil society organization that develops strategic communication campaigns and focuses on historical memory and transitional justice processes, seeking to center the victims of the armed conflict in El Salvador as a way to contribute to ensure that actions and policies related to truth, justice, reparation and measures of non-repetition guarantee victims' rights.

[ASDEHU](#) (Asociación Salvadoreña para los Derechos Humanos) is a Salvadoran civil society organization that addresses emblematic cases and issues of human rights violations that originated in the context of social violence, through comprehensive analysis, victim accompaniment and strategic litigation.

More information

Read answers to Frequently Asked Questions [here](#).

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