



Lawsuit Filed Against Former Colombian Military Official Living in the United States for Torture, Extrajudicial Killing

Family of slain Colombian Magistrate Judge Carlos Horacio Urán Rojas seeks justice in a Florida court for his 1985 torture and execution during the retaking of the Palace of Justice

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San Francisco, CA, February 15, 2022 – The Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), with co-counsel Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati (Wilson Sonsini), today filed suit against a former Colombian military official, Luis Alfonso Plazas Vega, for his alleged role in the 1985 torture and extrajudicial killing of magistrate judge Carlos Horacio Urán Rojas in Colombia.

The civil complaint was filed on behalf of three of Magistrate Urán’s daughters in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, where Plazas Vega now resides.

“For more than three decades, Plazas Vega has evaded responsibility for his role in the death of my father in Colombia,” said Xiomara Urán, Magistrate Urán’s daughter. “This suit, filed in the U.S. where Plazas Vega has now taken up residence, provides our family with a long-awaited opportunity at accountability and healing.”

On November 6, 1985, M-19 guerrillas stormed Colombia’s Palace of Justice, holding those inside the building hostage. In response, the Colombian military launched a brutal retaking of the Palace of Justice that left nearly 100 people dead—including eleven Supreme Court justices. The military informed the victims’ families that the deceased had been caught in crossfire with the guerillas, unfortunate victims of circumstance. Magistrate Urán was among those found dead inside the Palace of Justice.

“That explanation was a lie,” said CJA Senior Staff Attorney Daniel McLaughlin. Video and eyewitness evidence emerged that a number of those killed or missing from the Palace of Justice, including Magistrate Urán, were escorted out of the building alive by the military. In 2007, Magistrate Urán’s personal belongings were discovered hidden in a locked vault inside the Army’s 13th Brigade following a court-ordered search of the premises.

Plazas Vega, then a lieutenant colonel and commander of the Army’s 13th Brigade Cavalry School, led the military units charged with retaking the Palace of Justice. As alleged in the suit, Plazas Vega actively participated in the military’s unlawful system to identify, interrogate, torture and kill or forcibly disappear rescued hostages suspected by the military to have any affiliation with the guerillas.

“Magistrate Urán’s murder is part of a broader pattern of abuse and atrocities that have gone unchecked for far too long. We are thankful for the opportunity to partner with CJA to seek a measure of accountability on behalf of Magistrate Urán and his family,” said Luke Liss, Pro Bono Partner at Wilson Sonsini.

These decades of abuses are only now beginning to be reckoned with through domestic truth-telling and transitional justice processes. Yet, to date, no prosecutions have taken place in Colombia for Magistrate Urán’s torture and murder. “Colombian authorities’ efforts to hamper our search for truth and justice make it abundantly clear that they do not believe that those responsible for the murder of my father should answer for their crimes,” said Helena Urán Bidegain, Magistrate Urán’s daughter. “We want peace for Colombia too, but how can victims move on without ever knowing what happened to our loved ones or ever seeing those responsible for their torture and deaths held accountable? That is why we are bringing this case.”

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

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.

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