



Ex-Salvadoran Colonel Gets US Prison Sentence

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Human rights advocates called it a step toward justice Tuesday when a federal judge in Boston sentenced a Salvadoran ex-colonel to prison on separate charges as Spain attempts to prosecute him for war crimes during his country's civil conflict.

Inocente Orlando Montano will serve 21 months in a federal prison for immigration crimes, followed by a year of supervised release if U.S. government officials don't extradite him to Spain before then to stand trial for his alleged role in priest slayings known as the Jesuit massacre.

U.S. District Judge Douglas Woodlock meted out the penalty after a three-day sentencing hearing that included testimony implicating Montano in human rights abuses in El Salvador.

The 70-year-old Montano, who denies such abuses, was once his country's vice minister of public security. He had been living in a Boston suburb for about a decade before his 2011 arrest, making \$14 an hour in a candy factory.

Montano admitted to lying on immigration forms, pleading guilty to three counts of immigration fraud and three counts of perjury. He also agreed not to contest deportation proceedings to return him to El Salvador after his prison term.

In 1993, a United Nations commission named Montano as a member of El Salvador's military high command who took part in a meeting to plot the slaying of a priest suspected of supporting rebels during the country's civil war.

That meeting allegedly led to the 1989 slayings of six priests, their housekeeper, and her teenage daughter at a Jesuit university in El Salvador's capital city.

Montano previously has denied involvement in the priest killings. He was among 20 people Spanish authorities indicted in 2011 in connection with the massacre.

On Tuesday, he called it "a very, very terrible case," and said he was sorry about the death of the priests, while addressing the judge with the help of a Spanish language interpreter.

"Those individuals, in spite of their liberal mentality, were helping a lot in the peace process," Montano said.

He also said that the U.N. commission charged him and others with crimes based on complaints that were invented by people who were against the government.

The defendant said he had commanded very prestigious units, helping build playgrounds and roads as he kept up with not only military obligations, but "human obligations." He also spoke of his service as a military attache to Mexico, saying Mexican officials wouldn't have wanted him there if he was a criminal.

While leaving court, Montano said through a translator that he was satisfied with the sentence and hadn't decided if he would appeal.

Attorney Carolyn Patty Blum from the Center for Justice and Accountability, which is involved in seeking Montano's prosecution in Spain, said after the sentencing that it was "a huge step forward to be incarcerating him for anything."

U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz said in a prepared statement that Montano's sentence "sends a strong message that those alleged to have engaged in human rights abuses overseas should not expect to hide in the United States."

Prosecutors had asked for a prison sentence of more than four years, saying Montano immigrated to the U.S. in part to avoid potential prosecution for the Jesuit massacre.

Defense attorney Oscar Cruz Jr. had asked for probation, saying Montano had no fear of prosecution in El Salvador because of an amnesty law. Cruz said after court that he was pleased by Tuesday's outcome.

The judge said before announcing Montano's penalty that the immigration case wasn't a "springboard" for deciding if the defendant was guilty of human rights violations, even if evidence was significant.

"This much seems clear, that there were human rights violations by troops under Mr. Montano's command and he took no action," Woodlock said.

The judge had asked assistant U.S. attorney John Capin on Monday about the status of Spain's request to extradite Montano. Woodlock spoke privately with Capin on Tuesday, then returned to the bench and said the U.S. government hadn't taken formal action on the request.

Stanford University professor Terry Lynn Karl, an expert in Latin American politics who testified for the government, said she was pleased with Montano's sentence because it would give the U.S. time to extradite him to Spain.

A report by Karl alleged troops under Montano's command carried out dozens of killings and tortured hundreds, accusations that retired El Salvador military general Mauricio Ernesto Vargas denied in testimony for the defense.

The judge ordered Montano to report to prison on Oct. 11.

"If under these circumstances, you disappear, you'll be found," Woodlock told him.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/salvadoran-colonel-us-prison-sentence-20088665?page=2>

