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## Honduras' ex-intelligence chief faces torture charges

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More than 20 years ago, a journalist called Oscar Reyes and his wife Gloria, an interior designer, were taken from their home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras by members of the country's armed forces as part of an operation against suspected "subversives."

Over the following days, Oscar was suspended by handcuffs from a pulley and beaten while Gloria had electric shocks applied to her breasts and genitals before being beaten unconscious with rifle butts.

Now the man in charge of the country's intelligence service at the time has been tracked down to Florida and faces a civil action in the US courts brought by the Reyes and relatives of other detainees who did not survive to tell the tale.

The case is the latest in a series showing that military and intelligence chiefs whose forces were responsible for extra-judicial killings and torture can no longer escape trial by fleeing the country where the atrocities took place.

The case is due to be heard in a court in Miami, and involves the former Honduran military intelligence chief, Colonel Juan Lopez Grijalba.

Six people, five of them now resident in the US, allege that Lopez Grijalba was responsible for the torture, disappearance and killing of Honduran civilians during the 1980s.

More than 150 people died during that period. Lopez Grijalba was the head of the secret police force called DNI, and Battalion 3/16, a death squad operating at the time of the incidents.

Lopez Grijalba, who denies the charges, moved to the Miami area from Honduras in 1998, and is being held in a detention center by immigration authorities. He had been found to be teaching at the School of the Americas, the military training academy in Georgia that has been accused of training Latin American soldiers in violent interrogation techniques. He has said, through his lawyer, that he was unaware of the acts committed by his subordinates.

As well as Oscar Reyes -- who is now the director of a Spanish-language newspaper in Washington, DC -- those bringing the actions include Zenaida and Hector Ricardo Velasquez, the sister and son of Manfredo Velasquez, a university leader abducted and "disappeared" by intelligence agents in 1981. Relatives of Hans Madisson, a student who was abducted and murdered at the same time, are also among the plaintiffs.

Lopez Grijalba has ended up in court largely through the efforts of the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), a San Francisco-based human rights organization. The group pursues

alleged perpetrators of human rights abuses who have become residents of the US. "We were alerted to his presence in the US so we went about putting a case against him," said Matt Eisenbrandt of CJA.

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