

Massacre of Jesuits in El Salvador “Premeditated”

MADRID – Declassified CIA documents show that the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador followed three days of planning by senior Salvadoran military officers, an expert witness said on Tuesday before Spain’s National Court, which is hearing a case brought on behalf of the slain clerics.



The documents were introduced by Terry Karl, professor of Latin American studies at California’s Stanford University, who said the probe of the Jesuits’ murder must be pursued “to shatter the impunity that still exists in El Salvador.”

National Court Judge Ignacio Velasco agreed in January to accept a case brought by the Spanish human rights group APDHE and the U.S.-based Center for Justice and Accountability against 14 Salvadoran military officers.

The prosecution in Spain is based on the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” the same doctrine that led to the 1998 arrest in Britain of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet on the orders of National Court Judge Baltasar Garzon.

In this instance, however, Velasco declined to consider charges against Alfredo Cristiani, who was president of El Salvador at the time of the murders.

On Nov. 16, 1989, Salvadoran soldiers invaded the campus of the Central American University, or UCA, and killed then-chancellor Ignacio Ellacuria and four other Spanish priests: Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Amando Lopez and Juan Ramon Moreno, along with Salvadoran Jesuit Joaquin Lopez.

Also slain were a cook and her 16-year-old daughter.

The massacre came at the height of the 1980-1992 civil war between the Salvadoran military and FMLN rebels, a conflict that left some 80,000 dead.

Plaintiffs’ attorneys said the documents submitted to the court on Tuesday show that Salvadoran senior officers began planning the assassination of Ellacuria and his comrades on Nov. 13, 1989.



They said the package includes the record of a meeting between Cristiani and the then-defense minister, Gen. Rafael Humnero Larios, at general staff headquarters – “just 500 meters (yards)” from the UCA administration building – the night before the massacre.

Of the 14 members of the Salvadoran military who stood trial in September 1991 for the murders, only Col. Guillermo Benavides and Lt. Yussy Mendoza were found guilty. Though sentenced to 30 years in prison, they were released thanks to a broad post-civil-war amnesty.

El Salvador’s current president, Mauricio Funes, honored the slain Jesuits at a ceremony last week marking the 20th anniversary of the massacre.

The country’s first leftist head of state has spoken in favor of repealing the 1993 Amnesty Law shielding people who committed human rights abuses during the Salvadoran Civil War. EFE