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**SPANISH NATIONAL COURT TO PURSUE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION  
INTO 1989 MASSACRE OF JESUIT PRIESTS IN EL SALVADOR**

*Spain's Highest Court Agrees to Initiate Criminal Prosecution Against 14 Former High-Ranking Members of the Salvadoran Military for Notorious Jesuits Massacre, Reserves the Right to Charge Former President Cristiani*

Madrid January 13, 2009 – Today, the Judge of the 6<sup>th</sup> Chamber of the Spanish National Court agreed to initiate a criminal prosecution in the “Jesuits Massacre,” a crime which has gone unpunished for nineteen years, in which members of the Salvadoran military murdered six priests, their housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter. Fourteen former officers, including General Ponce, Head of the Armed Forces Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Rafael Humberto Larios, former Minister of Defense, are now formally charged with crimes against humanity and state terrorism for their role in the massacre. Additionally the Judge reserved the right, during the course of the investigation, to indict former Salvadoran President and Commander of the Armed Forces Alfredo Cristiani for his role in covering up the crime.

The case was filed by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) and by the Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos en España (APDHE), a Spanish human rights association, on November 13, 2008. “*The Judge's prompt action underscores the importance of this case not only for the families of the victims and the people of El Salvador but for the cause of human rights accountability around the globe,*” said CJA Executive Director, Pamela Merchant. “*We look forward to a successful prosecution of all of those responsible for this heinous act.*”

The Jesuits Massacre was one of the great religious crimes of the 20th century and a major tipping point leading to the end of the twelve-year Salvadoran Civil War. The Judge’s acceptance of the complaint formally opens the investigation phase of the criminal prosecution.

The full complaint can be viewed on the CJA website at [www.cja.org](http://www.cja.org). For interviews please contact Riptide Communications.

CJA is a San Francisco-based human rights organization dedicated to deterring torture and other severe human rights abuses around the world and advancing the rights of survivors to seek truth, justice and redress. CJA uses litigation to hold perpetrators individually accountable for human rights abuses, develop human rights law, and advance the rule of law in countries transitioning from periods of abuse.