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**CRIMINAL CHARGES FILED BEFORE THE SPANISH NATIONAL COURT
FOR 1989 MASSACRE OF JESUIT PRIESTS IN EL SALVADOR**

*Under the Principle of Universal Jurisdiction, Human Rights Groups Charge Former
President of El Salvador and 14 Former Members of the Military for Notorious
Jesuit Massacre*

Madrid November 13, 2008 – Today, criminal charges were filed in the Spanish National Court in a 19-year-old case known as the “Jesuits Massacre,” in which members of the Salvadoran military murdered six priests, their housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter. The 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 lawsuit was brought by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) and by the Madrid-based Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos en España, a Spanish Human Rights Association. The lawsuit charges 14 former officers and soldiers with crimes against humanity and former Salvadoran President and Commander of the Armed Forces Alfredo Cristiani for his role in covering up the crime, under the principle of universal jurisdiction—the same principle on which the landmark case against Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was based, which began in the Spanish National Court as well.

This case also follows the International Criminal Court indictment of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for genocide and the U.S. conviction of Charles “Chuckie” Taylor, Jr. for torture committed in Liberia. According to CJA’s Executive Director Pamela Merchant, *“This is yet another sign that the movement for international justice is gaining momentum. We hope that the filing of this important case will jumpstart justice efforts in El Salvador on a grander scale. Like al-Bashir, Fujimori, Pinochet and others, the architects of the Jesuit Massacre and other abuses committed during the 12-year Salvadoran civil war cannot escape justice.”*

Intending to pin the massacre on the FMLN - the opposition party - the Salvadoran military destroyed evidence in an attempt to frame them, and as an investigation was called for, the United States became involved.

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Representative Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) who as a congressional aid investigated the murders on behalf of the late Congressman Joe Moakley, leading to a sharp cut in U.S. aid to the military regime, said: *“The complete story has never been told about these shocking murders and the true architects have not been held accountable. I encourage the Salvadoran government to cooperate fully so that the truth will become known and justice will be served.”*

When the case went to trial in El Salvador in 1991, only two Army officers were found guilty of murder and “instigation and conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism.” The U.N. Truth Commission on El Salvador upheld the findings, but the 1993 Amnesty Law soon freed those convicted. The perpetrators – including former President Cristiani who had a key role in covering up the crime—continue to live in El Salvador, exerting political influence and lobbying to ensure that the 1993 Amnesty Law stays in place. Efforts by the University of Central America’s Human Rights Institute and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have been blocked. Salvadoran society remains haunted by the lack of justice, and the Amnesty Law is a major issue in El Salvador’s upcoming presidential elections.

The full complaint can be viewed on the CJA website at 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.