

Law suit filed in Fla. against Colombian warlord

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A jailed Colombian warlord has been sued by the relatives of two people believed to have been killed by his paramilitary forces.

The lawsuit against Carlos Mario Jimenez, who is awaiting trial on drug trafficking charges, was filed in federal court here June 14 and publicized by the plaintiffs' attorneys Thursday.

Relatives of Eduardo Estrada Gutierrez and Alma Rosa Jaramillo Lafourie, two people killed separately in 2001, are seeking damages under the Alien Tort Statute of 1789.

"The plaintiffs in this case have been looking for justice for a long time," said Kathy Roberts, an attorney for the Center for Justice and Accountability, which is representing the plaintiffs. "For them, truth and justice are the key pieces."

Estrada and Jaramillo were both activists in the Program for Peace and Development, which opposed the drug trade and drew the ire of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC, then controlled by 44-year-old Jimenez.

Estrada had three bullets fired into the back of his head. Jaramillo's torso was found in a river, showing signs of having been mutilated with a power saw; her head, arms and legs were never found.

The lawsuit seeks to garner damages from the 2008 seizure of 25 homes, 23 vehicles and six businesses belonging to Jimenez valued at \$20 million, though Roberts acknowledged any funds would be difficult to recover.

She said the plaintiffs were most interested in being able to state publicly what they endured and to confront Jimenez.

A New York-based attorney for Jimenez referred calls to her Florida co-counsel. A message left at that attorney's office was not immediately returned.

Jimenez surrendered in 2006 under a peace pact with the Colombian government.

Tens of thousands of paramilitary fighters were demobilized as part of the 2003 deal, which required that top commanders confess to crimes in exchange for reduced sentences. But Jimenez was described by authorities as the least cooperative of some 50 warlords and eventually was stripped of peace deal benefits that included protection from extradition.

The U.S. Treasury Department has named Jimenez a specially designated narcotics trafficker, freezing any of his American assets. Washington also accuses him of money laundering and financing terrorist groups.

Many victims of the private militias - which killed thousands of people and stole millions of acres of land - opposed Jimenez's extradition to the U.S., arguing that sending him overseas would hurt efforts to seek compensation for his victims and prosecute his partners in crime.

Before his surrender, Jimenez was accused of ordering massacres and of shipping tons of cocaine to the United States.

Colombia's paramilitaries were organized and funded by wealthy landowners and drug traffickers in an effort to wrest control of the countryside from leftist insurgents.

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