

Salvadoran military man linked to 1989 Jesuit massacre faces extradition to Spain

[Linda Cooper & James Hodge](#) April 21st 2015

A historic trial on the 1989 Jesuit massacre in El Salvador is a step closer to reality now that the U.S. Justice Department is seeking to extradite a former Salvadoran army colonel to Spain to face murder and terrorism charges in connection with the Jesuit case.

Former Col. Inocente Orlando Montano Morales, 72, is one of 20 Salvadoran military men indicted in 2011 by the Spanish National Court for the massacre in which six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter were executed. Five of the six priests were Spanish nationals.

The indictment relies in part on the 1993 United Nations Truth Commission report, which named Montano, the vice minister of public safety, as one of the military high command who sat in the meeting where the murders were plotted and ordered.

Just hours after that meeting, members of an elite U.S.-trained "anti-terrorist" unit stormed the Jesuit university, dragging the priests to a garden and blowing out the backs of their heads with high-powered assault rifles. To eliminate witnesses, the unit executed the priests' cook, Julia Elba Ramos, and her teenage daughter, Celina, riddling them with bullets as they clung to each other.

Jesuit Frs. Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramón Moreno and Amando López were from Spain. Fr. Joaquín López y López was Salvadoran.

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Ellacuría, the rector of the Central American University in San Salvador, was the main target. His was perhaps the strongest voice for a negotiated end to the country's civil war.

The Spanish court has been unable to proceed with the case because El Salvador has refused to extradite the defendants, claiming an amnesty law protects them from prosecution for war crimes.

Montano lost that immunity when he entered the United States illegally in 2002. For a decade, he lived near Boston until he was discovered in 2011 by the Center for Justice and Accountability, a human rights organization based in San Francisco.

After U.S. officials found he had falsified immigration documents, he was convicted of perjury and immigration fraud and sentenced to 21 months in a federal prison in North Carolina. He had just completed serving that sentence on April 16 when the Justice Department stepped in and asked a federal judge in North Carolina to extradite him to Spain.

In papers filed with the court, Justice Department lawyers also say that Montano "shared oversight responsibility over a government radio station that, days before the massacre, issued threats urging the murder of the Jesuit priests."

Montano is being held in custody until the court rules. If sent to Spain, Montano would be the highest-ranking official extradited from the United States for human rights abuses.

His extradition would enable the Spanish court to proceed with a trial that is 26 years overdue, said Almudena Bernabeu, an international attorney with the Center for Justice and Accountability.

Bernabeu in conjunction with the Spanish Human Rights Association filed the suit that led to the indictments in Spain in 2008. The Spanish court subsequently issued international warrants under the principle of "universal jurisdiction," which holds that some crimes against humanity are so heinous they can be prosecuted across international borders.

The trial, Bernabeu said, would consolidate everything that has been investigated in the last 25 years so the story of the massacre can be told "in a way that tells the complete truth and guarantees criminal accountability."

Bernabeu said she understands why Montano and other war criminals take a chance to come to the United States. "It's out of arrogance. They saw the United States as a friend. They never saw it as a threat. And they have their pensions, they keep a pretty low profile so they live comfortably." She said she has a harder time understanding how they get into the country.

And Montano wasn't the only Salvadoran officer named in the Spanish murder indictment who was tracked down in the United States by the Center for Justice and Accountability. Bernabeu said former Lt. Hector Ulises Cuenca Ocampo was discovered living in California and working for the Transportation Security Administration at the San Francisco International Airport.

After the Spanish indictments were made public in 2011, Cuenca Ocampo disappeared. The U.N. Truth Commission had publicly named Cuenca Ocampo, a former member of El Salvador's National Intelligence Department, as one of the participants in the Jesuit massacre.

Records show that two years after the massacre, the U.S. Army approved Cuenca Ocampo to take an advanced combat arms class at the Army's School of the Americas. Of the 27 Salvadoran military officers implicated by the U.N. Truth Commission for the Jesuit murders, 22 were graduates of the school, now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Puzzling is how Montano got into the country. While Montano lied several times on immigration papers for temporary protected status, claiming never to have served in the military or to have received military training, he did not use a false name. His real name "should have sent up red flags," Bernabeu said.

Montano lived for a decade in Boston, the hometown of the late Congressman Joe Moakley, who spearheaded the congressional investigation into the Jesuit murders and reported the initial link between the Jesuit killers and their training at SOA.

The U.S. Army's records show that Montano received military training in 1970 at its School of the Americas.

In addition, the U.N. Truth Commission not only linked Montano to the military high command that ordered the Jesuit murders, but cited him for participating in a cover-up and pressuring "lower-ranking officers not to mention orders from above in their testimony."

He is also singled out in a 1990 U.S. Senate report titled, "Barriers to Reform: A Profile of El Salvador's Military Leaders."

The Senate report named Montano as one of 15 members of the Salvadoran High Command with dismal human rights records. It linked Montano not only to the Jesuit case, but to several other atrocities.

In August 1986, when Montano was commander of the Engineering Brigade, soldiers under his command kidnapped three brothers. "The next day, their bodies were reportedly found in the street with their throats cut and one's tongue cut out," the report says.

In July 1987, when Montano was commander of the 6th Brigade, soldiers under his command reportedly threw a grenade into a house, killing one and wounding eight others inside, including six children. The same month, soldiers under his command threatened a man who had refused to sell them bread and five days later "riddled him with bullets in his hammock, while simulating a firefight outside his house," the report said.

In January 1989, soldiers under his command seized two members of an agricultural cooperative. "The two men's bodies were found three days later with arms and ears cut off," the report said,

adding that the Armed Forces claimed the two men were rebels who had been killed in a firefight with the Army.

<http://ncronline.org/news/global/salvadoran-military-man-linked-1989-jesuit-massacre-faces-extradition-spain>