

SALVADORAN GENERAL WHO COMMITTED TORTURE DEPORTED FROM FLORIDA

[Trevor Bach](#) Thursday April 9th 2015



Demonstrators greet former Salvadoran general Carlos Vides, deported yesterday for former war crimes.

He was finally sent back. Yesterday Carlos Vides, the former Salvadoran general, war crimes perpetrator, and central Florida resident was deported to El Salvador after being held for weeks at an immigration detention center in Louisiana. For Vides' thousands of Salvadoran victims, and for the lawyers and activists in the United States who worked for decades on their behalf, his deportation marked a watershed victory for justice.

"You never really think it's going to happen until it actually happens," said Patty Blum, a lawyer with the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) who worked on behalf of torture victims in suits against Vides. "He's going back home in disgrace."

From 1979 to 1983, Vides, as director of El Salvador's national guard, was a top commander in a Salvadoran military that killed and tortured tens of thousands of civilians during the bloodiest years of that country's civil war. For the next six years, while atrocities continued, he served as

the country's minister of defense — effectively the nation's most powerful position — and then in 1989 fled to Florida. For decades he lived in suburban Palm Coast, north of Daytona Beach, as a legal resident.

But Vides' dark history was never forgotten. In 2002 Vides and Jose Garcia, his predecessor as minister of defense, were found liable for torture in a landmark civil suit, brought by CJA, in West Palm Beach. The decision opened the door for deportation proceedings, and in 2012 Vides was ordered out. (The cases were chronicled in a New Times cover story last year.)

Just a few weeks ago, a U.S. immigration appeals board in March upheld the decision, setting the stage for Vides' return, although proceedings were still expected to drag on for months. But they didn't. After being arrested at his home and taken to the facility in Louisiana, yesterday Vides was put on a plane—along with some 120 others who had run afoul of immigration authorities — bound for San Salvador. Blum and her colleagues were in touch with Salvadorans at the airport, who confirmed the disgraced general exited the plane, just like everybody else.

There was a group of demonstrators waiting for him, including two of the surviving torture victims who testified against the general in the U.S. The group, accompanied by TV cameras, waved signs and held enormous banners filled with black-and-white photos of victims' faces.

"He was greeted, [let's} put it that way," Blum said. "I'm sure he was not thrilled."

Under El Salvador's existing amnesty law Vides cannot currently be charged, although there's been momentum building inside the country to remove the law. The broader movement for justice for El Salvador's victims is also building in other ways: On the same day Vides was deported, the U.S. government filed a request to extradite another former Salvadoran strongman, Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano, to Spain so he could stand trial for his role in the 1989 Jesuits Massacre, one of the bloody decade's most notorious crimes.

Montano, a former Vice Minister of Public Safety, had been a longtime Boston resident before he received a 21-month federal prison sentence in August 2013 for lying to immigration authorities.

"It's a major breakthrough," Blum said of the extradition request.

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