

THE INDEPENDENT

Eugenio Vides Casanova: El Salvador general linked to rape and murder of four American nuns is deported from Florida

[Andrew Buncombe](#) New York Thursday April 9th 2015



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A former general convicted of human right abuses during El Salvador's civil war has been deported from the US – despite his claim that the country's military tactics were backed by Washington.

Eugenio Vides Casanova, 77, who also served as the country's defence minister and was tied to a series of killings including the death of four American nuns, had been living in Florida since retiring in 1989. Activists his removal was unprecedented.

Mr Casanova was taken into custody by US officials in March following a judge's ruling that he had "committed, ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in acts of torture and extra-judicial killing".

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On Wednesday, Mr Casanova was among 120 individuals from El Salvador flown back to the country by US authorities, said Jennifer Elzea, a spokeswoman for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Most were not associated with the civil war.

Reports said that a number of human rights activists and survivors of civil war abuses protested outside San Salvador's airport as the former general arrived. The Associated Press said that among them was Juan Jose Romagoza, who filed a US civil suit against Mr Casanova that resulted in a million-dollar judgment for him and two other Salvadoran plaintiffs in 2002.

"I was captured, wounded, tortured, held in the national guard's prisons under this general," Mr Romagoza said. "I am here to demand justice, a search for truth and for him to go on trial. Only then can we forgive."

It is estimated that more than 75,000 people were killed and another 10,000 disappeared during El Salvador's 1980-1992 civil war, between a right-wing government supported by the US and leftist rebels.

Carolyn Blum, a legal advisor to the Centre for Justice and Accountability, a California-based group that has led a series of civil actions against individuals implicated in Latin America's so-called dirty wars, said the removal of Mr Casanova was an unprecedented step.

"The law changed in 2004 and made it easier to deport people and it was this law that was used," she told The Independent.

Mr Casanova, who in the 1980s was twice awarded the US government's Legion of Merit, had argued that his removal was unfair because the US government had supported the authorities in El Salvador in what a bloody and brutal operation against rebels with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

A succession of US courts upheld a civil damages case against Mr Casanova and another former defence minister, General José Guillermo García, brought by three victims of torture. In 2006, Mr Casanova was forced to relinquish more than \$300,000 as a part of the ruling.

He has also been linked to the 1980 rape and murder of four US nuns and church supporters - Maura Clarke, Jean Donovan, Ita Ford and Dorothy Kazel - who working with refugees in El Salvador. Four national guardsman convicted in 1998 of their murder testified that they were working on "orders from above".

The AP said that Mr Casanova and other former military figures are protected by an amnesty law covering crimes committed during the civil war. As such he will be able to live freely in El Salvador.

At the airport, uniformed officers escorted Mr Casanova to a vehicle outside the terminal. Officials said that he, along with other individuals returning, was given a package with food, and was interviewed by immigration officials and police.

Mr Casanova's lawyer, Diego Handel, said that the US government was displaying hypocrisy and said previous administrations had fully supported - militarily and financially - the operations against the rebel forces as part of a broader regional strategy.

"It's a massive betrayal of somebody was essentially doing Washington's bidding," he said, speaking from Florida.

In another development, the US Justice Department said it will seek to extradite another officer from El Salvador living in the US to Spain.

Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano Morales is one of 20 former Salvadoran military officials who have been charged there with the 1989 killing of six Jesuit priests. He is currently serving time in a North Carolina jail for immigration fraud.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/eugenio-vides-casanova-el-salvador-general-linked-to-rape-and-murder-of-four-american-nuns-is-deported-from-florida-10166107.html>