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Salvadoran Indicted in Priest Slayings to Face Separate US Immigration Sentencing

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BOSTON — Inocente Orlando Montano is expected to stand for federal sentencing on immigration charges next week in Boston, yet it could be the former El Salvadoran military colonel's alleged war crimes and not his lies on U.S. immigration forms that take center stage.

In 1993, a United Nations commission named Montano as a participant in a meeting to plot the slaying of a priest suspected of supporting leftist rebels, which allegedly led to the 1989 slayings of six priests and two other people at a Jesuit university in El Salvador.

However, Montano has denied involvement in what's known as the Jesuit massacre and the defense has portrayed him as a patriotic former military engineer whose humanitarian efforts included founding an orphanage with the help of the Catholic church.

Montano was once his home country's vice minister of public security as part of a 30-year career as an elite member of the El Salvador Armed Forces.

He'd been living in a Boston suburb for about a decade and working in a candy factory for about \$14 an hour before his 2011 arrest. Authorities alleged he lied on immigration forms by falsifying his arrival time and claiming he didn't have military training while applying for temporary protected status as a foreign national. He already has pleaded guilty in federal court in Boston to three counts of immigration fraud and three counts of perjury.

U.S. government lawyers have claimed the defendant came to the U.S. in part to avoid possible prosecution in El Salvador, something his attorney says isn't true because that country's amnesty law was in no danger of disappearing.

His lawyer said the 70-year-old came to the United States in July 2001 because he lost a large part of his life savings in business investments in a cable company and a car wash that failed, and because of hardships in El Salvador following earthquakes that year.

Montano is among 20 people that authorities in Spain indicted in 2011 in connection with the killings of the Jesuits, their cook and her teenage daughter, during El Salvador's civil war. The Justice Department referred an inquiry about whether U.S. officials would extradite Montano to Spain to the U.S. attorney's office in Boston. A spokeswoman said Thursday that the government was aware of the charges in Spain but wouldn't comment on whether there would be extradition proceedings.

The government is asking for a sentence of more than four years in prison. A defense memo asks the judge to sentence Montano to five years of probation.

Defense attorney Oscar Cruz Jr. declined to comment on the case Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Douglas Woodlock previously said he would consider departing from sentencing guidelines when deciding a penalty. He said in January when delaying sentencing that, if proved, the allegations linked to Montano's acts with the military would cause him "to consider an upward departure."

Witnesses at Montano's sentencing could include a Stanford University professor who wrote a report that claims that troops under Montano's command carried out dozens of killings and tortured hundreds, as well as a retired El Salvadoran general who would dispute those allegations.

Attorney Carolyn Patty Blum from the Center for Justice and Accountability, whose organization is involved in seeking prosecution in Spain against those indicted in the Jesuit killings, believes the judge will consider the ex-colonel's history before deciding a penalty in the immigration case.

"To me, there's no question that accountability for the human rights violations is going to be a factor in the sentence," she said Thursday.

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