

GUATEMALA: Police Chief Charged in Election Riots

RRN letter 8/25/03

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RRN members wrote Guatemalan officials to protest the riots instigated by FRG party supporters of presidential candidate General Ríos Montt in late July 2003. (The Constitutional Court of Guatemala ruled in July that the former dictator could run for president, despite rulings by two electoral courts and even the Guatemalan Supreme Court denying his eligibility.)

During the riot, FRG supporters, many wearing ski masks and wielding clubs, smashed shop windows and held office workers hostage in a daylong rampage known in Guatemala as "Black Thursday." Journalist Hector Ramírez, age 61, died of a heart attack trying to escape a mob threatening to lynch him. Several other journalists were persecuted during and after the riots. Furthermore, staff of the Human Rights Ombudsman's office received death threats.

January 30, 2006 update

Guatemala throws out charges against ex-dictator

GUATEMALA CITY, Jan 30 (Reuters, edited/excerpted) - Former strongman Efraín Ríos Montt will not stand trial for instigating a fatal riot three years ago, a court decided on Monday.

Raul Manchame, who was Guatemala's chief of police at the time of the street clashes, will have to stand trial; 15 other FRG party supporters were charged with minor crimes.

Two other lawsuits, one in Guatemala and one in Spain, have been filed against Ríos Montt for ordering the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians during his 1982-1983 rule, the bloodiest period of Guatemala's 36-year civil war. The war killed 200,000 people, mainly Maya Indians, before peace accords were signed in 1996.