

HONDURAS: SOA Grad/Death Squad Leader found Guilty

The case against López Grijalba marks the first time a military leader has been held responsible for human rights abuses committed in Honduras.

During the 1980s, a special military intelligence unit known as Battalion 316 carried out a series of abductions, disappearances and killings against Honduran civilians. The death squad operated in conjunction with the DNI (National Investigations Directorate), and under the command of the intelligence section of the Armed Forces, known as G-2. As the head of the DNI in 1981 and the chief of military intelligence in 1982, López Grijalba exercised command over the soldiers who tortured Oscar and Gloria Reyes and murdered Manfredo Velásquez and Hans Madisson.

Miami, April 3 2006: A federal judge in Miami has ordered Colonel Juan López Grijalba, a former military intelligence chief from Honduras, to pay \$47 million to torture survivors and relatives of civilians murdered by Honduran military forces in the early 1980s. **Judge Joan A. Lenard held López Grijalba legally responsible for torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances in the Central American nation, stating that his conduct was “highly egregious.”**

In a written opinion, Judge Lenard ruled that **López Grijalba had ordered the detention and murder of Manfredo Velásquez, a university student leader, in 1981.** Manfredo’s sister, Zenaida Velásquez, was awarded \$2 million in compensatory damages and \$3 million in punitive damages. Judge Lenard awarded his son, Hector Ricardo Velásquez, \$3 million in compensatory damages and \$3 million in punitive damages.

The judge also found that López Grijalba played a key role in a military operation in 1982 that led to the torture and murder of innocent civilians. **On July 8, 1982, members of the Honduran Armed Forces abducted and tortured Oscar and Gloria Reyes during a raid of their Tegucigalpa neighborhood.** Oscar and Gloria testified at trial that they were subjected to beatings, continuous electrical shocks and a mock execution.

During the same operation, **Honduran troops brutally abducted and murdered 24-year-old university student Hans Madisson,** whose exhumation later showed that he had been mutilated and decapitated. The judge found that López Grijalba was present at the military raid and issued orders to soldiers.

Judge Lenard ordered López Grijalba to pay Oscar and Gloria Reyes each \$6 million in compensatory damages and \$7 million in punitive damages. Two sisters of Hans Madisson were each awarded \$2 million in compensatory damages and \$3 million in punitive damages.

In the early 1980s, López Grijalba controlled the notorious intelligence police force DNI (*Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones*, National Investigations Directorate), and the death squad known as Battalion 316. **Both units were responsible for widespread human rights abuses in Honduras as part of a systematic program of disappearances and political murder.** He moved to the Miami area in

1998. In October 2004, while the case was still pending, U.S. immigration authorities deported López Grijalba for his involvement in human rights abuses.

The lawsuit was filed in 2002 on behalf of the plaintiffs by the Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), a San Francisco-based human rights organization that works to end impunity by bringing to justice perpetrators of human rights abuses, especially those who live in or visit the United States. CJA attorneys Matt Eisenbrandt and Almudena Bernabeu were joined on the *pro bono* legal team by Ben Reid and Gus Bravo of the Florida law firm Carlton Fields.

After reviewing the written judgment, CJA Litigation Director Matt Eisenbrandt stated, "The court's ruling provides a powerful condemnation of Colonel López Grijalba's barbaric behavior and complete disregard for the lives of Honduran civilians. Our courageous clients are happy that he has finally been punished for his crimes. We again call on Honduran authorities to take this judgment and the evidence we have gathered and bring criminal charges against Colonel López Grijalba in Honduras."

For more information, please visit CJA's website at www.cja.org. Monday, April 03, 2006 3:43 PM