

# Center for Justice and Accountability

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/romagoza-arce-v-garcia-and-vides-casanova/clients/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

**Carlos Mauricio** was a professor at the University of El Salvador when he was detained in June 1983 and tortured for nearly two weeks at the National Police Headquarters. After coming to the United States, he obtained two Masters degrees, in Molecular Genetics and Adult Education, from San Francisco State University, and a teaching credential. He subsequently taught biology at Balboa High School in San Francisco. He is currently working with the Stop Impunity Coalition to raise awareness about human rights issues.

Carlos was born in the town of Ahuachapn, El Salvador. At the age of 13, he moved to San Salvador with his family, where he soon found a construction job at the University of El Salvador. After high school, he studied agricultural engineering at the university, supporting himself by teaching in local high schools and working as an assistant professor. He won a scholarship to study in Mexico, where he received his Masters degree at the University of Merida. He then returned to El Salvador to continue teaching.

In June 1983, Carlos was teaching a class when individuals dressed in civilian clothing entered the classroom and asked him to move his car. Once he was on the street, he was forced into an unmarked car and beaten. He was then taken to National Police headquarters, where he was detained for nearly two weeks. During that time, he was tortured and interrogated repeatedly.

Upon being released, Carlos fled El Salvador for the United States. Carlos has suffered permanent physical and emotional injuries as a result of the abuse he underwent while detained. The physical wounds from his detention include broken ribs, an injured eye and persistent pain in his shoulders, joints and chest.

Carlos interest in bringing Generals Jos Guillermo Garca and Carlos Vides Casanova to trial stemmed from his firm belief that seeking justice helps to heal the emotional wounds caused by torture.

Since the verdict in his case in July 2002, Carlos has spoken extensively to the press in the United States and El Salvador and to numerous community groups and churches about the experience of confronting human rights abusers in a U.S. courtroom.

Carlos is dedicated to helping other survivors, especially those from El Salvador, tell their stories and deal with trauma. To this end, he has begun work on the Stop Impunity Coalition, an organization that seeks to connect Salvadoran torture survivors to needed psychosocial and medical services and to disseminate the lessons learned from his case.

**Neris Gonzalez** worked to improve health care and education in her agricultural village of San Nicolas Lempa in El Salvador. Her efforts earned her the respect and admiration of the San Nicolas villagers, but they also made her a target for the violence the Salvadoran military used to exert control over the civilian population. The mid-1970s brought conflict and terror to her village as the growing military, civilian and government conflicts grew into what would be a 12-year civil war.

On December 26, 1979, National Guard soldiers seized Neris from an outdoor market. She was taken to the basement of the National Guard Post where she was held captive, tortured and raped. Neris survived the abuse but the trauma of what she had endured continued to haunt her.

In 1997 Neris sought political asylum in the United States and began receiving treatment for the wounds inflicted by torture. Subsequently, she directed an organization in Chicago that teaches ecological awareness and sustainable agricultural methods. She later worked at an environmental non-profit organization in Washington D.C. She currently lives in El Salvador where she continues to work on human rights issues.

Without the case, Neris remarked after the trial, my therapy would have been about words, not action. The case was the best therapy possible.

[\*Read an in depth piece on Neris's life by journalist Julia Lieblich in the Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine.\*](#)

**Dr. Juan Romagoza Arce** was working as a country doctor for the rural poor in El Salvador when, in 1980, he was detained and tortured for 22 days at National Guard headquarters.

Juan was born in Usulután and entered medical school at the University of El Salvador in 1973. As part of his medical training, he set up medical clinics and provided health education in poor areas of San Salvador and neighboring communities. He worked closely with Catholic churches and Christian Base Communities (community groups organized under the principles of Catholic Liberation Theology) that helped organize medical services for the poor in rural areas. During his surgery rotation and early practice, Juan witnessed increasing incidents of violence and repression targeted against the poor, church workers, and the medical professionals who aided them. Yet, despite great risk to his own safety, Juan continued his volunteer work, motivated by his deeply held Christian principles.

Juan took his work to remote areas of the countryside where the need for medical assistance was the greatest and where the population had been most affected by the war. In December 1980, as he was providing medical care at a church clinic in Santa Anita, Chalatenango, two vehicles carrying soldiers from the army and National Guard arrived and opened fire upon the people at the clinic. Juan was shot in the foot and taken by helicopter to a local military garrison. During the flight, soldiers threatened to throw him from the helicopter. Shortly thereafter, Juan was transferred to National Guard headquarters in San Salvador.

For the next 22 days, he was interrogated, beaten and tortured almost every day, sometimes three or four times per day. His torture included electric shocks, cigarette burns, water torture, and being hung by his fingers. During one session, his torturers shot him in his left hand as they taunted him that he would never be able to perform surgery again. During his detention, Vides Casanova was physically present on two occasions, including the day of Juans release in early January.

After his release, Juan fled El Salvador. He arrived in the United States in April of 1983 and was granted political asylum in 1987. He lost his ability to perform surgery due to the injuries inflicted during his detention.

While in the United States, Juan maintained his commitment to community health work. He became active in assisting the refugee community in San Francisco, and co-founded the Central American Refugee Center (CRECE). In 1987, he became the Executive Director of La Clinica del Pueblo in Washington, D.C., which provides free, comprehensive health care and education services to low-income, uninsured people. In 2008, Juan fulfilled his long-held dream of returning to El Salvador to provide free medical treatment to the communities he began his career serving, and founded the Clinic El Espino, Usulután, El Salvador. He is now the Director of the Eastern Region for the Ministry of Health.

Over the years, Juan has received many awards including the Community Health Leadership Award from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Marcelino Pan y Vino Humanitarian Award. He was also included in the book *Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Kindness & Courageous Acts of Service*, a book that honors people who have made outstanding community contributions.

In August 2003, [the Washington Post Sunday Magazine did a cover story on Juan](#) chronicling his courage, strength, and remarkable achievements. You can also read [Juans testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights & the Law](#).



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## GERALD GRAY LEGACY CIRCLE

GERALD GRAY FOUNDED CJA IN 1998 AND CONTINUES  
WORKING TO HELP TORTURE SURVIVORS TODAY.

### Join the Gerald Gray Legacy Circle

To join, please let us know that you have included CJA in your estate plans, insurance policy, or planned giving instrument by contacting us at [center4justice@cja.org](mailto:center4justice@cja.org). We will ensure your gift supports CJA's mission and welcome you to the Gerald Gray Legacy Circle.

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*"We will never catch all the torturers—but we will always catch some,  
and none of them will ever know who is next."*