

# Center for Justice and Accountability

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

<https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/the-guatemala-genocide-case/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

**CJA is pursuing justice for the genocide of thousands of indigenous Guatemalans during the countrys civil war, which left over 200,000 dead. CJAs main targets? Guatemalas former head of state General Efran Ros Montt and senior officials who led a systematic campaign of violence.**

General Efran Ros Montt came to power in Guatemala through a coup in March 1982. A month later, he launched a scorched earth operation against the countrys Ixil Maya population. Under Ros Montts dictatorship, the army and its paramilitary units systematically annihilated over 600 villages.

Armed forces cordoned off each village, rounded up the inhabitants, separated the men from the women and then killed them all. Those who managed to escape were hunted from the air by helicopters. The Ixil Maya faced extreme torture, mutilation, sexual violence, and violence against their children.

Today, this dark period is referred to as the Silent Holocaust. Ros Montt was Guatemalas head of state for just 17 months but his short reign stands out as the bloodiest period in Guatemalas history.

In 1999, three years after the peace accords of 1996, the first efforts to hold the genocides ringleaders accountable took place in Spain. The Rigoberta Mench Foundation filed a criminal complaint before the Spanish National Court against Ros Montt and other senior officials. CJA joined the case as lead counsel in 2006. In a historic move, CJA brought over 40 indigenous Guatemalans to Madrid to testify about the atrocities they faced, marking the first time a national court had heard evidence from Maya survivors on Guatemalas Silent Holocaust.

The Spanish legal proceedings later helped form a case in Guatemala. In 2012, a Guatemalan court with CJA acting as a key advisor indicted Ros Montt on accusations of torture, genocide, forced disappearances, state terrorism, and crimes against humanity. The trial resulted in Ros Montts conviction and he was sentenced to 80 years in prison.

This was the first time that a former head of state had been convicted of genocide by a national court. The ruling was also the states first official acknowledgment that the genocide had occurred. However, just weeks later, the judgment was overturned.

A retrial was ordered, but suspended in a ruling on May 6, 2016. On March 31, 2017, in a separate case, a court ruled that Rios Montt could stand trial for genocide in the Dos Erres Massacre, in which more than 200 civilians were killed. As the national courts of Guatemala prove their intent to prosecute grave crimes, the Spanish National Court will not likely proceed. CJA supports the efforts of Guatemalan courts to prosecute the historic crimes that occurred within their borders.

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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."***