

# Center for Justice and Accountability

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

<https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/chavez-v-carranza/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

**In 2005, CJA was victorious in a case against Colonel Nicolas Carranza, the former Vice Minister of Defense of El Salvador who carried out a campaign of violence against civilians during the countrys civil war. Carranza was ordered to pay \$6 million in damages to CJAs five clients for the torture they endured and for the murder of their family members in the 1980s. CJAs case marks the first time that a U.S. jury in a contested case found a commander liable for crimes against humanity.**

In 1980, Ana Patricia Chavez was at home with her family when she witnessed plainclothes gunmen enter her house and murder her parents in cold blood. Chavez was forced to watch the gunmen beat her mother and listen to the gunshots that took her mothers life.

That same year, the Salvadoran National Police jailed and tortured Cecilia Moran Santos, a government statistician. She was charged with being a subversive, imprisoned for three years, and denied access to an attorney.

Two years later, five armed men abducted Daniel Alvarado, an engineering student, shortly after an American military advisor was shot in the capital. The men took Alvarado to the headquarters of the Treasury Police, where he was tortured. His captors blindfolded Alvarado and suspended him from a ceiling. He was shocked with electrical wires, and forced to falsely confess to the advisors murder.

Chavez, Moran and Alvarado are just three among thousands in El Salvador who were subjected to the governments systematic campaign of forced disappearances, sexual violence, torture and murder against civilians in the early 1980s. At the helm of these government security forces and death squads who carried out the violence? Nicolas Carranza, El Salvadors former Vice Minister of Defense. Under his watch, 10,000 to 12,000 unarmed civilians were assassinated in 1980 alone.

In 1985, Carranza left his military past behind him and started life anew in the United States, where he worked as a security guard in a Memphis museum and eventually gained citizenship.

In 2005, CJA tracked down Carranza and filed a civil lawsuit against him on behalf of five survivors of the abuses perpetrated under Carranzas command. A jury found Carranza responsible for torture, extrajudicial killing and crimes against humanity and awarded our clients a total of \$6 million in damages.

Carranza appealed, arguing that he was protected under a 1993 Salvadoran amnesty law to protect those involved in abuses during the war. The appeal was rejected.

Carranzas liability in this case is based on his responsibility as a commander for abuses committed by forces under him. The verdict was also the first legal finding of crimes against humanity by the Salvadoran security forces during the civil war.

CJA and pro bono co-counsel pursued collection of the \$6 million judgment against Carranza and successfully garnished one of his bank accounts. Carranza was reported to have died in August of 2017.



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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."***