

**Tuesday, July 22, 2003**

- GUATEMALA CITY -- Guatemala's Supreme Court has suspended the presidential bid of the former dictator, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, after political parties challenged a ruling allowing him to run.

A Supreme Court judge, José Quezada, said the parties' appeal had been accepted and Ríos Montt could not formally register as a candidate for the Nov. 9 elections until the legal dispute was resolved.

Rights groups say Ríos Montt ordered thousands of Mayan Indians massacred during his 1982-83 rule at the height of a 35-year civil war during which 200,000 people died. The war ended in 1996.

Guatemala's electoral court and the Supreme Court had ruled that a 1985 constitutional clause banning ex-dictators from the top job prevented Ríos Montt from running.

But the Constitutional Court -- the highest in the country -- last week accepted Ríos Montt's argument that his rule ended before the constitutional clause was written, and said he could run. If the Supreme Court makes its ruling permanent, Ríos Montt could appeal.

-- From News Services

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