

Ex-Guatemalan dictator faces genocide trial
By Mariano Castillo, CNN
27 January 2012

A Guatemalan judge has ordered the country's former dictator to stand trial on charges that he was responsible for atrocities committed during his rule.

Efraín Ríos Montt will remain under house arrest while prosecutors work to gather evidence that would link him to genocide and human rights abuses.

After hearing prosecutors' initial arguments Wednesday, judge Patricia Flores agreed there was enough evidence to keep the former leader confined.

"These crimes are horrendous and it was established that within the military structure you -- Ríos Montt -- found yourself in the command structure," the judge said, according to the *Prensa Libre* newspaper.

Ríos Montt ruled Guatemala from 1982 to 1983.

He came to power in a coup and led a military junta at a time that Guatemala was in a bloody civil war between the army and leftist guerrillas. The war did not end until 1996. It left more than 200,000 people dead and 1 million as refugees.

Prosecutors argued that Ríos Montt was aware of the repressive strategies that the military was using against anyone suspected of being a guerrilla, such as killings, forced disappearances and kidnappings, the state-run AGN news agency reported.

The human rights abuse and genocide allegations against him come from his "scorched earth" campaign to root out insurgents in provinces heavily populated by indigenous populations. During his rule, there were massacres in these provinces in which, according to the Guatemalan truth commission, between 70% and 90% of some villages were razed. The commission found that during this and other periods of the civil war, there were reported cases of rape, especially of Mayan women.

Ríos Montt did not address the court. His attorneys argued that the former dictator has cooperated with prosecutors and that the chain of command at that time was set up so that he didn't know about the abuses. The regional commanders had the final say in what strategies they used, his lawyers said, according to AGN.

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