

# Genocide in Guatemala

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

Stating “The principle function of the state and its officials is to protect its citizens” (*NYTimes*), Judge Miguel Angel Gálvez ordered the trial of Efraín Ríos Montt, former dictator of Guatemala and his intelligence chief José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, for genocide.

Among other war crimes Ríos Montt is allegedly responsible for the murder of 1771 Ixil Indians between 1982-3 (his term in office), in a war against domestic resistance which killed 200,000 predominantly aboriginal peoples. The U.S. sided with and supported his government. Israel supplied the military with arms and training. Ríos Montt escaped prosecution for many years as a parliamentarian through immunity, the power of the military, and an ambivalent justice system.

He was previously charged with genocide by Judge Santiago Pedraz of the Spanish National Court on July 7, 2006 but released when Guatemala proved reluctant to proceed. His background includes training at the *Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC)*/ the *School of the Americas* and ordination in the California based Pentecostal Church of the Word (*El Verbo*). The military’s attempt to murder large portions of Guatemala’s Mayan Indian population is currently reflected in the murder of labour leaders, human rights workers, and community leaders facing foreign mining interests. Canadian mining companies have operated in Guatemala since the CIA takeover of the Arbenz government in 1954.

Ríos Montt is the first former head of state in North, South or Central America to actually be tried for the crime of genocide. As noted on these pages [July 7, 2012](#), Jorge Rafael Videla, President of Argentina (1976 – 1981), was found guilty simply of stealing the children of the dissidents he occasioned to be murdered and was sentenced to fifty years in prison.

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Historical note:

Former President Echeverría of Mexico was charged with genocide. The judges tried to apply a statute of limitations to the substantial evidence of his crime. That failed. Previous: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#). In July 2007 *The New York Times* reported Mexican Federal Judge Luna simply granted Echeverría absolute protection against all charges. No foreign nation presented any objection to the United Nations as allowed under *Article VIII* and *Article IX* of the [Convention on Genocide](#). In this instance Mexico violated *Articles IV, V, VI*, joining the United States and Canada in the judiciary’s removal of sure application of the Convention to acts of their country’s leaders. See [“North American game plans and the Convention on Genocide”](#). This continues a genocide warning for aboriginal

populations in [Mexico](#), the [U.S.](#) and [Canada](#).

Partial sources online:

"Guatemala ex-dictator to stand trial on genocide charges in civil war killings of Indians," *AP*, Jan. 28, 2013, *The Washington Post*; "Guatemala ex-dictator to stand trial on genocide charges in civil war killings of Indians," Sonia Perez-Diaz, *The Associated Press* Jan. 28, 2013, *The Ottawa Citizen*; "Ex-Dictator Is Ordered to Trial in Guatemalan War Crimes Case," Elisabeth Malkin, Jan. 28, 2013 *The New York Times*; "US-Backed Guatemalan Dictator to Face Charges of Genocide," John Glaser, Jan. 29, 2013, *antiwar.com*; "Efraín Ríos Montt," current, *Wikipedia*; "Guatemala ex-ruler Rios Montt to face genocide trial," Jan.28, 2013, *BBC News*; "Federal Judge Overturns Ruling Against Mexico's Former President in 1968 Student Killings," James C. McKinley Jr., July 13, 2007, *The New York Times*.

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