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Rodrigo Rosenberg, the lawyer who accused Guatemala's president in a video made before his death (see NotiCen, 2009-05-14), orchestrated his own assassination, revealed Judge Carlos Castresana, head of the UN-sponsored Comision Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG), last week. Rosenberg, 47, was shot five times on May 10, 2009, while riding his bicycle near his home in Guatemala City. "If you are watching the message, it is because I was assassinated by President Alvaro Colom," said Rosenberg in a videotape distributed during his funeral the following day. The story travelled around the world and caused a national outrage, leading hundreds of people, mainly upper-class residents of Guatemala City's wealthy suburbs, to take to the streets demanding President Colom's resignation (see NotiCen, 2009-06-25). The government responded by mobilizing governing-party supporters, mostly the urban and rural poor who have benefited from the social programs implemented by first lady Sandra Torres. In the videotape and a written statement, Rosenberg accused Colom, Torres, and Colom's private secretary Gustavo Alejos of money laundering at the partly state-owned Banco de Desarrollo Rural (Banrural) and linked this to the murder of his client, businessman Khalil Musa, and Musa's daughter Marjorie. However, Spanish Judge Castresana proved that Rosenberg planned his own murder down to the last detail, hiring a gang of killers who believed they had been paid to kill an extortionist. By recording the video and arranging his killing in this way, says Castresana, he sought to inflict the greatest possible damage on the Colom administration. Rosenberg's carefully crafted plan has backfired badly because his cousins Francisco and Estuardo Valdez Paiz are now considered fugitives from justice as CICIG investigators claim they used the head of security of their pharmaceutical company to hire the killers who murdered Rosenberg for US$40,000. Evidence paints picture of troubled man In a two-hour press conference attended by the media, foreign diplomats, and civil-society organizations, Castresana showed that Rosenberg had purchased two cell phones one to communicate with the killers and another to send death threats to his own number. CICIG investigators said the Cambridge-educated lawyer, who had worked for some of the wealthiest families of the Guatemalan establishment, felt a deep sense of guilt because of his inability to bring Musa's killers to justice. Rosenberg was apparently emotionally unstable, suffering a deep depression following the death of his mother and the loss of his children after a bitter custody battle with his ex wife, as well as the murder of Marjorie Musa, with whom he had a relationship. Rosenberg's behavior prior to his murder certainly points to his emotional fragility. On April 21, he bought two plots in the family graveyard one for Marjorie Musa and another for himself. Three days later, Rosenberg told his secretary to prepare his will, and he spoke to a priest. On May 4, he retired from his own law firm. Two days later, he put his assets in his children's names and recorded the videotape that would shake the Colom administration to the core. A coup plot? Rosenberg's posthumous videotape was distributed by controversial radio and TV journalist Mario David Garcia and Luis Mendizabal, the former Guatemalan liaison with the far-right Salvadoran Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) party. As the presidential candidate for the now defunct far-right Central Autentica Nacionalista (CAN), Garcia lost the 1985 elections to Vinicio Cerezo.
(1986-1990), Guatemala's first civilian president since 1970. Cerezo proposed tax and minimum-wage increases, much like Colom has done. Garcia's controversial television program "Aqui el Mundo" was shut down after he was charged with being involved in an attempted coup on May 11, 1988. This led the government to point to a destabilization plot behind the Rosenberg tape. Castresana has now said that there is no evidence to support this and also said that Colom, Torres, and Alejos had been cleared of any wrongdoing and were no longer under investigation. After Castresana published his findings, Colom said he was satisfied and relieved by the outcome of the investigation. "The day has arrived that I have waited for in silence and patience, where this crime has finally been clarified," he said later at a press conference. "I don't hold a grudge in my heart, just a huge sense of gratitude toward those who accompanied us with great patience, without ever doubting me." In a speech to Congress on Jan. 15, Colom added that those who, in his opinion, threaten the country's stability will be tried for sedition. Although Colom has been cleared of any involvement in Rosenberg's murder, CICIG still has to follow up a number of leads that could yield uncomfortable findings for his administration. One is the money-laundering allegations involving Banrural and another is the claim that former interior minister Salvador Gandara paid a supposed witness, Juan Perez Leon, to falsely involve leaders of the right-wing opposition Partido Patriota (PP) in the case. Gandara is also accused of using one of the first lady's helicopters to fly CICIG investigators and journalists to a site in the department of Quetzaltenango where they were presented with the false evidence. Castresana is also investigating the Musa killings, although he says that this will be a difficult task as CICIG investigators were not present at the crime scene. A fallen hero? So what about those who proclaimed Rosenberg a national hero and took to the streets to demand Colom's resignation? Some feel duped and disappointed. A group called "I, too, was conned by Rodrigo Rosenberg" appeared on Facebook soon after Castresana published his findings. But others find the results of CICIG's investigation too hard to believe. "I've read people's comments on Prensa Libre and elPeriodico's blogs and 75% believe that this cannot be true," says Alejandro Quinteros, one of the young activists who organized the May demonstrations and went on to found the pro-justice group Movimiento Civico Nacional.

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