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## Candidate Accused of Human Rights Abuses

by LADB Staff

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Peruvian nationalist presidential candidate Ollanta Humala has faced accusations in the press and in the nation's prosecutor's office that he held command during a reign of human rights abuses in the early 1990s while using the nom de guerre Captain Carlos Gonzalez.

In February, five people filed criminal complaints accusing Humala and his soldiers of disappearances, torture, and attempted murder during his 1992 command of the jungle base Madre Mia in the Huallaga River Valley. Five criminal complaints for 1992 abuses in Huallaga Valley Human rights groups say about 300 people disappeared that year in the Huallaga Valley, where locals were caught in the crossfire among Maoist Sendero Luminoso rebels, cocaine traffickers, and soldiers stationed in counterinsurgency bases.

Teresa Avila, one of the five complaint filers, says she found her brother-in-law floating in the Huallaga River, a bullet in his forehead and knife wounds in his chest, a week after soldiers dragged him and his wife from their jungle home. Her sister's body never turned up. She had already gone to the Madre Mia counterinsurgency base looking for them, Avila says, but the commander, known as Captain Carlos, denied they were there. "He told me, 'Your family is a scourge and if they were in my hands, I would kill them all.'"

Nearly 14 years later, Avila has identified Captain Carlos as Humala, now a retired army lieutenant colonel with a good chance of becoming Peru's next president. Humala, 43, acknowledges using the pseudonym Captain Carlos to avoid rebel reprisals at the time but denies any wrongdoing. He says he is being smeared to derail his presidential campaign. Initially, he had denied being Captain Carlos, but after he admitted to it, he said he was only one of four officers who used the pseudonym and that he knew of a Captain Carlos who violated human rights but would not reveal his identity. "They want to destroy a soldier, but I will not permit it,"

Humala told a rally in a poor Lima neighborhood. Throughout February, Peruvian media aired testimonies from jungle residents accusing Humala of overseeing systematic abuses in the area. Humala poll numbers stop rising Humala, a strident nationalist who says he would exert state control over Peru's economy and crack down on corruption, is running a strong second behind the establishment candidate, former congresswoman Lourdes Flores, in a field of 21 candidates. But he has seemed to lose momentum since allegations of atrocities aired and after Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's support for his campaign touched off international tensions between Peru and Venezuela (see NotiSur, 2006-01-27).

Various analyses explained the stalling of his meteoric rise in the polls with patriotic resentment of Chavez's influence, the accusations regarding his role at Madre Mia, or the fact that the media has mostly been in strong opposition to his campaign. One poll in late February by Datum Internacional showed a sharp drop in the number of Peruvians who thought he would win the April 9 election.

Yet the value of opinion surveys and their ability to accurately judge "hidden" factors in the region's various electorates has come into serious doubt following two recent elections in Bolivia and Costa Rica where the outcomes differed radically from the repeated prognostications of several polling firms (see NotiSur, 2006-01-06 and NotiCen, 2006-01-26, 2006-02-09). In both cases, surveys significantly underestimated the strength of candidates opposed to US policies.

### *Electoral tricks or real charges?*

Humala's spokesperson, Daniel Abugattas, accused Flores' campaign of paying jungle dwellers to fabricate the allegations and said Humala would not respond to any media questions about Captain Carlos. A source in the office of prosecutor Luz Ibanez, who is coordinating the investigation by the public prosecutor's office of human rights violations allegedly committed or supervised by Humala, said that they had begun to gather testimony and would soon visit Madre Mia.

"This is not only a case involving Ollanta Humala, because during the period that he was posted to that area, there were three other Captain Carloses as well," said the source.

Humala has said, "Let them file charges, I will respond to each one. They can put me in prison if they want, but nationalism will continue to gain ground." He added, "If I am summoned by the judge, I will appear in court." One of Humala's arguments for his innocence is that his name does not figure anywhere in the final report put out by the Comision de la Verdad y la Reconciliacion (CVR), which investigated the political violence of the 1980s and early 1990s (see NotiSur, 2002-09-13, 2003-09-12, and 2003-12-12).

"It is true that the report does not list Humala as responsible for the torture or killing of civilians during the dirty war," say the commission's former chair, Salomon Lerner, and two other former commissioners, Sofia Macher and Carlos Tapia. But they have also said that because of the limited time they spent conducting the probe the testimony of a number of people in many cases went undocumented. That was especially true, they said, of the testimony collected in the Amazon jungle region where Captain Carlos operated.

Peruvian elections have been known for rough-and-tumble political campaigns. President Alejandro Toledo was accused before the last election of partaking in a cocaine-imbued tryst with three prostitutes in a Lima motel, while his main opponent, former President Alan Garcia (1985-1990), faced rumors that he took lithium for manic depression. Neither allegation was proven. "It's one thing to consume lithium and another cocaine," Garcia said then. He's running again, a distant third in the race, although some recent polls show him making forward strides.

Peruvians still have memories of the brutal guerrilla war and savage backlash by security forces between 1980 and 2000 that killed nearly 70,000 people and caused US\$22 billion in damage. It was common then for military patrols to abuse people believed to be rebel sympathizers, said Tapia. "They would kick in doors, kick the suspects, drag them out, beat them up, and take them to the base," Tapia said. "At the base, they would be interrogated, tortured, in many cases murdered and made to disappear."

Avila's brother, Jorge Avila, says he, too, was taken captive and beaten and tortured with electric shocks for eight days "in the presence of Captain Carlos." He alleges that he escaped late one night by leaping into the Huallaga River after soldiers took several captives to a jungle spot known as el matadero (the slaughterhouse) to be killed.

Newspaper Peru 21 reports that excavations are slated to begin at Madre Mia to find if bodies have been buried there. Not all of Humala's accusers were suspected of guerrilla involvement. Zonia Luis, who ran a drug store and small grocery in front of the Madre Mia base, told La Republica newspaper that Humala and a dozen soldiers broke into her home one night, stole her money, roughed her up, and shaved her head in retribution for demanding they settle unpaid bills. Humala has denied that allegation as well.

Humala, who graduated in 1984 from the military academy in Chorrillos, has not mentioned that, in 1983, he took a course at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA), then based in Panama before it moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1984. Tens of thousands of Latin American officers and soldiers have taken courses at the notorious US Army institution, where they are trained in combat, counterinsurgency, and counternarcotics techniques.

In 1996, the US Department of Defense was forced to release training manuals used to instruct Latin American military personnel at the SOA that advocated torture, extortion, and execution as counterinsurgency tactics. Other Peruvian graduates of the school include the now-imprisoned (see NotiSur, 2002-07-05, 2003-03-07 and 2004-01-30) Vladimiro Montesinos, spymaster under President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), and Telmo Hurtado, wanted by the courts for a 1985 massacre in the Andean highlands town of Accomarca, where campesinos, many of them women and children, were shot to death and their bodies incinerated.

The National Coordinator for Human Rights in Peru is providing legal representation to the jungle families. Spokesperson Alejandro Silva says his group is simply trying to uncover the truth. "It is important to clear this up," Silva said. "We believe that those who aspire to be president should have stain-free records."

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