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Zedillo Names New Special Investigator for Colosio Case

by LADB Staff

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In late August, President Ernesto Zedillo appointed human rights attorney Luis Raul Gonzalez Perez to head the investigation into the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio. Gonzalez Perez, who until recently served on the government-sponsored national human rights commission (Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH), is the fourth person to head the investigation. Colosio, the presidential candidate for the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was gunned down at a campaign rally in Tijuana in March 1994 (see SourceMex, 04/06/94).

Gonzalez Perez replaces Pablo Chapa Bezanilla, who was forced to resign from the post after a federal judge released Othon Cortes Vazquez, whom the government had accused of firing the shots that killed Colosio. Chapa was removed from the post only five days after a federal judge ruled that the government had insufficient evidence to charge Colosio's former bodyguard, Othon Cortes, in the assassination (see SourceMex, 08/14/96). In a press conference shortly after his nomination, Gonzalez Perez pledged to conduct a thorough investigation of all circumstances leading to Colosio's assassination, including a review of all the evidence collected thus far, to determine whether any of his predecessors Miguel Montes Garcia, Olga Islas, and Chapa Bezanilla engaged in a cover-up.

Underscoring his commitment to resolving the Colosio case, Gonzalez Perez said he would be the "last special prosecutor" to investigate the assassination of the former presidential candidate. During the press conference, Gonzalez Perez presented a long list of questions that had not been answered in previous investigations. Furthermore, the new prosecutor pledged that no individual would be exempt from having to present testimony regarding the case, including former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his top adviser Jose Cordoba Montoya.

Despite his link to the CNDH and his strong commitment to resolving the Colosio case, Gonzalez Perez's appointment met with strong skepticism. For example, in an article published in mid-September, the weekly news magazine Proceso questioned whether the new prosecutor has adequate experience in prosecuting criminal cases to carry out the duties demanded by the post. "We were expecting more," said judicial experts Raul Carranco y Rivas and Jose Luis Soberanes in an interview with Proceso. The two specialists said the role of the new prosecutor, rather than fill a post, should be to help the government recover the lack of confidence caused by the inability of Montes, Islas, and Chapa to solve the case. Still, Soberanes questioned whether any individual can perform an effective job in the post, since authorities failed to collect crucial evidence, such as blood samples, shortly after the assassination. "The existence of a special prosecutor has been a political matter," said Soberanes. "Now, it does not make sense to maintain this office."

For his part, Gonzalez Perez defended his appointment, saying his lack of experience in the criminal field is not necessarily an obstacle in resolving the case. "The fact that I have not worked for institutions engaged in criminal investigations is not synonymous with inexperience," said Gonzalez

Perez. "There are no moral or judicial obstacles in my career that would prevent me from taking charge of this investigation." Despite the grumblings about the appointment, however, very few criticisms were heard from the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and members of other opposition parties. Members of the PRI, the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), and the Labor Party (PT) had turned down the Zedillo administration's offer to help select a replacement for Chapa Bezanilla.

Still, the Colosio case was a topic of debate during the 17th annual meeting of the PRI in mid-September. A faction of PRI members circulated a petition urging that Zedillo ask for the resignation of "members of his cabinet" responsible for the lack of progress in the investigation, in an apparent reference to Attorney General Antonio Lozano Gracia. Lozano is a member of the opposition National Action Party (PAN). [Sources: El Financiero International, 09/09/96; Proceso, 09/15/96; Novedades, 09/19/96; La Jornada, 09/01/96, 09/19/96; Agence France-Presse, 09/18-20/96]

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