

12-16-1998

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### Recommended Citation

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## **Prosecutors Offer Final Arguments in Murder Case Against Raul Salinas**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 1998-12-16*

The Mexican government has presented final arguments in the trial of Raul Salinas de Gortari, who is accused of masterminding the murder of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu in September 1994. Ruiz Massieu, who was then secretary-general of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), was gunned down as he emerged from a fund-raising breakfast in Mexico City (see SourceMex, 10/05/94).

Former federal deputy Manuel Munoz Rocha is said to have fired the shots that killed Ruiz Massieu, but prosecutors contend he was acting on Raul Salinas' instructions. Munoz Rocha's whereabouts are unknown, although there is some speculation he was also murdered.

Salinas, brother of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has remained in federal custody since February 1995 on charges of planning Ruiz Massieu's murder. Deputy attorney general Jose Luis Ramos Rivera, who is the government's third special prosecutor in the Ruiz Massieu murder case, said the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) had put together a strong case against Raul Salinas, but the final decision has been left to federal Judge Ricardo Ojeda Bojorquez.

Judge Ojeda will hand down the final verdict against Raul Salinas since there is no jury system in Mexico. Ojeda's decision is expected sometime in December 1998 or January 1999. When the PGR first launched the probe against Raul Salinas, investigators surmised the crime may have been politically motivated. Investigators said Ruiz Massieu was considered a reformer within the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and posed a potential threat to the power of the Salinas family (see SourceMex, 03/08/95). "There were never strong witnesses to support those conclusions," said Ramos, who noted that the killing may have resulted from a family feud between Raul Salinas and Ruiz Massieu, who was once married to Salinas' sister Adriana.

But Ramos acknowledged that PGR officials had made a number of mistakes and procedural errors in the course of the Salinas investigation, such as bribing a key witness in exchange for his testimony. Because of those mistakes, said Ramos, the prosecution stands only a 50-50 chance to gain a conviction against Raul Salinas. "We presented all of our evidence, we made a great effort, and that which comes next is exclusively the responsibility of the judge, as is the case in all civilized nations on earth," said Ramos. There is some concern in Mexico that if Raul Salinas goes free, the Ruiz Massieu case would meet the same fate as the assassinations of Roman Catholic Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo in May 1993 and former presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in March 1994. Both those cases remain unresolved.

Raul Salinas, who has maintained his innocence throughout his imprisonment at the Amoloya federal penitentiary, says the charges against him are motivated by political enemies of his brother.

"Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu is the forgotten one here," Salinas said. "He has become a pretext for the authorities to make me a scapegoat for their inability and frustrations." In addition to the murder charges, the PGR recently brought new charges against Raul Salinas for illicit enrichment. Mexican authorities have accused Raul Salinas of using his power and influence to gain massive wealth. The case, which is being tried in a separate court, questions how Salinas was able to obtain millions of pesos as a mere director of the state-run foodstuffs company *Compania de Subsistencias Populares (CONASUPO)* during his brother's administration.

### *Government also considers drug trafficking probe*

The PGR is also considering charges against Raul Salinas for drug trafficking. The government's case could be bolstered by evidence compiled by Swiss prosecutors, who have accused the former president's brother of laundering drug profits through banks in Switzerland and other European countries. Earlier this year, Switzerland confiscated more than US\$114 million from Raul Salinas de Gortari's bank accounts in Switzerland and the London branch of a Swiss bank (see SourceMex, 10/28/98).

In late November, Swiss Attorney General Carla del Ponte traveled to Mexico City under high security to present evidence compiled by her office against Salinas to her counterpart, Attorney General Jorge Madrazo. As part of the government's drug trafficking investigation of Raul Salinas, the PGR sent a special team to Colombia in mid-December to determine whether the former president's brother had links to the Cali drug cartel. Attorney General Madrazo said the Mexican delegation will interview 12 known Colombian and US drug traffickers who have acknowledged the delivery of US\$300,000 worth of cocaine to Raul Salinas.

Meantime, a report released by the US General Accounting Office (GAO) in mid-December accused US bank Citibank of failing to invoke its own safeguards against money laundering when transferring US\$100 million for Raul Salinas to accounts in Europe. In particular, the GAO report said Citibank officials never asked for standard information on Raul Salinas' financial background and made virtually no effort to verify the source of the money. The bank began a closer scrutiny of Salinas' activities in 1995, shortly after he was arrested in Mexico on charges of murdering Ruiz Massieu. But even then, his personal bankers in New York quietly advised Salinas' wife Paulina Castanon, to transfer the money out of Citibank, apparently with consent from the bank's legal department, the report said.

Even after Citibank started to inform US federal authorities about possible "suspicious" transactions by Salinas, bank officials failed to mention a network of foreign shell companies and offshore accounts that the bank had set up to shield the Salinas fortune. "We determined in the Salinas scenario that Citibank's voluntary controls did not work," the GAO report said. "Citibank, while violating only one aspect of its then policies, facilitated a money-managing system that disguised the origin, destination, and beneficial owner of the funds involved." Congressional sources told the Washington Post the report could lead to hearings in the House or Senate banking committees next year.

The GAO report could also lead the Justice Department to speed up its investigation of the Salinas-Citibank relationship to determine if the bank was involved in any civil or criminal violations.

Depending on the Justice Department's investigation, US banking regulators will have to decide whether to take any enforcement or regulatory actions against Citibank. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Dec. 16, reported at 9.90 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, 12/01/98; Associated Press, 11/30/98, 12/02/98, 12/04/98; El Economista, 12/02/98, 12/04/98; The Washington Post, The New York Times, 12/04/98; Reuters, 11/17/98, 12/10/98; Novedades, 12/01/98, 12/10/98; La Jornada, 12/01/98, 12/03/98, 12/10/98; The Dallas Morning News, 12/02/98, 12/10/98; El Universal, 12/01/98, 12/03/98, 12/10/98, 12/15/98)

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