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Government Arrests Alleged Key Figure In 1993 Assassination Of Roman Catholic Cardinal Juan Posadas

by LADB Staff

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Mexican authorities have detained one of the alleged assassins of Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo, archbishop of Guadalajara, but Catholic Church officials say there are still many holes in the case, which has officially remained unresolved since 1993. Alfredo Araujo Avila is said to be a top enforcer for the Tijuana cartel, run by the Arellano Felix family. Avila, known as El Popeye, was also wanted in connection with the attack on Tijuana newspaper publisher Jesus Blancornelas. Mexican authorities, armed with several arrest warrants, detained Araujo at his home in Tijuana in late January after receiving an anonymous tip Regarding his whereabouts.

During interrogations, two other enforcers for the Tijuana cartel identified Araujo as a key figure in the attack that killed Cardinal Posadas in May 1993. Posadas, who was waiting in a limousine near the terminal at the Guadalajara airport for Mexico's Vatican representative Nuncio Girolamo Prigione, was killed in a barrage of gunfire. The assailants allegedly mistook the Posadas' limousine for the vehicle used by Joaquin Guzman Loera, leader of the rival Sinaloa cartel, who is also known as El Chapo. Security forces for the Sinaloa drug organization were present at the airport on the day of the attack, which left six other people dead, investigators said. Araujo is also said to have directed the attack in 1997 against Blancornelas, who was the publisher of the Tijuana-based Semanario Zeta, a weekly newspaper that investigated the activities of drug-trafficking organizations in Baja California.

Blancornelas was seriously wounded but survived the attack (SourceMex, December 17, 1997 and June 30, 2004). He died in late 2006 after an extended illness (SourceMex, December 16, 2006). "[Araujo] is considered one of the most dangerous hit men of the Arellano Felix cartel," Army Gen. German Redondo, who participated in the arrest, told Reuters. A dozen other people have been arrested in connection with the attack on Posadas, including former Sinaloa police commander Jorge Humberto Rodriguez Banuelos. Rodriguez, who was detained in 2005, was allegedly one of the assailants who peppered Posadas' vehicle with bullets. Catholic Church continues to push conspiracy theory Araujo's arrest did little to appease Catholic Church officials in Mexico, who contend that Posadas was the intended target and not an innocent bystander.

Church officials, led by Posadas' successor Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iniguez, argue that Posadas was murdered because he knew of connections between the drug organizations and key members of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which governed Mexico for nearly seven decades. Sandoval Iniguez, who has been outspoken about his conspiracy theory, became embroiled in a very public feud with ex-attorney general Jorge Carpizo McGregor, whom he accused of covering up the facts in the case while he was head of the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) during the administration of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1993-1994 (SourceMex, June 13, 2001 and June 04, 2003).
In a press conference shortly after Araujo's arrest, Sandoval raised concerns that authorities would extract a forced confession from the ex-Tijuana cartel enforcer saying that he mistook Posadas for El Chapo Guzman, the hypothesis that the PGR has pushed all along. Sandoval said authorities on numerous occasions have linked arrested drug-cartel members to the Posadas case. "Every time authorities put a drug-cartel member in jail and link him with the Posadas case, they say he was the one who pulled the trigger," said the Guadalajara archbishop. "There are now about three dozen drug traffickers in custody who are accused of having participated in the Posadas murder." Sandoval did not totally dismiss Araujo's arrest. "I think it is important that he was taken into custody because he is a dangerous criminal and a danger to society," said the archbishop.

The Roman Catholic bishops' conference (Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, CEM) supports Sandoval's position, repeating its demand that the government conduct an investigation of what it considers a state crime. Calling the various explanations about the Posadas case "ridiculous," CEM spokesman Hugo Valdemar Romero urged the government of President Felipe Calderon to uncover the truth behind the Posadas case. "This was a cowardly murder," said Valdemar. "This crime, like any other crime, deserves to be clarified truthfully."

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