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El Salvador: Jesuit Murder Trial Resumes

by Deborah Tyroler

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On May 27, judiciary spokespersons said that Col. Camilo Hernandez and Argentine Col. Jose Luis Garcia testified before Judge Ricardo Zamora, presiding judge in the Jesuit murder case. Col. Hernandez, who served as deputy director of the military academy at the time of the massacre, formerly pleaded innocent before Judge Zamora to charges that he ordered the destruction of log books documenting the comings and goings of military academy personnel. No details of his current testimony were released. According to prosecuting attorney Henry Campos, Col. Garcia, a member of the Latin American Institute of Geopolitical Studies, was to provide technical testimony as to troop deployment and command structure. Next, Judge Zamora heard testimony from Corp. Catarino Lobato Ayala, who headed initial investigations into the crime. On May 28 in a local television interview, Col. Garcia said, "I believe that coverup is clear...in all of this. Why? I do not know, but there could have been a political problem." Garcia said that Latin American armies operate uniformly and that their "responsibilities are very clear. In this case, it is not possible that an intermediate level command[er] would be solely responsible for aberrant acts such as the assassination of the six priests and that these acts would not have provoked an immediate reaction from superiors." Meanwhile, a judiciary spokesperson told reporters that Judge Zamora had requested that over a dozen officers elaborate on earlier testimonies. They include Defense Minister Emilio Ponce, deputy defense minister Gen. Orlando Zepeda, deputy security minister Col. Inocente Montano, army high command chief Gen. Gilberto Rubio, former National Police director Col. Mauricio Guzman. President Alfredo Cristiani has also been requested to provide further testimony concerning a meeting he attended with military commanders on the night preceding the murder. In addition, judiciary spokespersons said Zamora requested that US Ambassador William Walker submit a recording of a Jan. 12, 1990 interview he had with former US military adviser to El Salvador, Maj. Erick Buckland. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 05/27/91; AFP, 05/27/91, 05/28/91)

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