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Guatemala: Former Defense Minister Gramajo To Be Tried In Absentia In Two Suits Filed In U.S. Courts

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to a report by the Cerigua news service, former defense minister Hector Gramajo (1987-1990) has failed to respond to two lawsuits filed in US courts by relatives of human rights abuse victims. Consequently, Gramajo will be tried in absentia for murder, torture and disappearance of several persons in the 1988 El Aguacate massacre, and the rape, torture and defamation of US nun Dianna Ortiz in 1989. A final judgment awarding the plaintiffs damages up to US\$50 million is expected in early 1992. Attorney Beth Stephens of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), who is representing the plaintiffs, said, "These historic decisions represent a finding that the Guatemalan military is responsible for the murder and gross abuse of thousands of Guatemalans...Gramajo's default is an admission of guilt. He [is]...held responsible for some of the worst human rights abuses ever committed in the Americas." (Basic data from Cerigua Weekly Briefs, 11/10-16/91)

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