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Guatemala: Charges Filed Against Judge Denying U.S. Extradition Request

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Feb. 13, Supreme Court of Justice president Juan Jose Rodil told reporters that Judge Oscar Humberto Lopez had been removed from the bench, and charges would be filed against him. In January, Lopez denied a US extradition request for former Zacapa mayor Arnaldo Vargas, wanted on drug trafficking charges. US Embassy officials subsequently revoked Lopez's travel visa. (See CAU 01/31/92 for previous coverage.) Rodil said the decision "demonstrated that public officials are not above the law." He added that the US Embassy in Guatemala had nothing to do with the decision. Interior Minister Acisclo Valladares told reporters that on Feb. 15, four armed men, including one of Vargas' brothers, were arrested by police. The four had reportedly submitted counterfeit documents ordering Vargas' release to prison officials. In statements made to reporters on Feb. 20, Vice President Gustavo Espina denied that the government had made a deal with the US to extradite Vargas in exchange for reduced criticism by Washington of Guatemala's human rights record. (Basic data from Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/13/92, 02/16/92, 02/20/92)

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