

Beat: News

Former Colonel Montano sentenced to 133 years for the death of the Jesuits

At the UCA of El Salvador on 1989

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USPA NEWS - The Spanish National Court sentenced this Friday the former Salvadoran colonel and former Vice Minister of Public Security of the Central American country Inocente Orlando Montano to 133 years and four months in prison, as responsible for the murders of six Jesuit priests, a domestic worker and her daughter, occurred at dawn on November 16, 1989 at the Central American University (UCA) of El Salvador, of which the liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría was rector.

Ellacuría and four other murdered Jesuits were Spanish, so the Spanish National Court declared itself competent to judge the murders as an act of terrorism against Spanish citizens. Former Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano was extradited to Spain two and a half years ago from the United States, where he was serving a sentence for an illegal immigration crime. He is the only person responsible for the massacre perpetrated on November 16, 1989, which has been tried in Spain, since the others remain in El Salvador.

Spanish Jesuits were targets of Salvadoran death squads for their defense of the poor. The priests had tried to mediate between the Government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to reach an agreement that would end an undeclared war that had so far cost tens of thousands of deaths. The Jesuits denounced the Human Rights violations committed by the Army and extreme right-wing cells against the Salvadoran peasants, complaints that years before had cost Archbishop Oscar Romero the life and that were uncomfortable for the Army High Command, at whose peak a group of ultra military called 'La Tandoná' was integrated.

In that group was Inocente Orlando Montano, who was already then Vice Minister of Public Security. 'La Tandoná' accused the Jesuits of collaborating with the guerrillas and, several days before the massacre, harassment campaigns were launched against the religious, with slogans such as: "Make a homeland, kill a priest." At the same time, the military commanders designed a punishment operation against the Jesuits, whose main objective was the elimination "without witnesses" of Ignacio Ellacuría. The former colonel convicted by the Spanish National Court was present at that meeting.

The Jesuit was an ideologist of Liberation Theology, whose postulates spread throughout Latin America during the 80s and 90s of the last century. The military commissioned the operation to the 'Atlacalt' battalion, which had been transferred two days earlier to the country's capital, San Salvador, to register the headquarters of the UCA. One of the members of said battalion, René Mendoza, declared during the trial followed at the National Court that they received the order to eliminate Ellacuría directly from the Salvadoran High Command.

Some forty heavily armed soldiers stormed the UCA during the early hours of November 16 and assassinated the Spanish priests Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín Baró, Segundo Montes, Armando López and Juan Ramón Moreno; the Salvadoran Jesuit Joaquín López, the Salvadoran housekeeper Julia Elba Ramos and her daughter, Celina Mariceth Ramos, 16 years old.

The National Court, which this Friday publicly read the sentence, considers the direct participation of Inocente Orlando Montano in the murders proven and condemns him to 26 years, four months and one day for each of the murders of the five Jesuits, of which he can only serve a maximum of 30 years in prison, which is the maximum contemplated by Spanish law. The sentence is not final, since there is an appeal against it.

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