

## **Efrain Rios Montt, Guatemala Ex-Dictator, Gets Second Genocide Charge**

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A judge lodged a second genocide charge against a former Guatemalan dictator on Monday accusing him in the massacre of more than 200 villagers.

The charge came just months after a similar order to try ex-dictator Efrain Rios Montt for the killings of 1,700 Indians.

Judge Carol Patricia Flores ruled prosecutors presented sufficient evidence to warrant a trial on the new charge.

In the latest case, prosecutors allege Rios Montt was responsible for a military operation that killed 201 farmers in the northern hamlet of Dos Erres.

Rios Montt already is facing a genocide trial after being charged in January for allegedly causing the displacement of 29,000 Indians and the killings of 1,771 Mayans. His lawyers are seeking to block the trial, arguing an amnesty law covers Rios Montt, who ruled Guatemala in 1982-83.

Asked if he had anything to declare at a hearing on the new charge, the 85-year-old former general said he was innocent.

"It is under military law, your honor, that I declare I am innocent," Rios Montt said in a courtroom crowded with victims' relatives and human rights activists.

Many in the audience clapped when the judge ordered that Rios Montt be tried on the latest charge.

On Dec. 7, 1982, soldiers from the elite special forces Kaibil unit attacked the community of Dos Erres, looking for missing weapons that guerrilla groups operating in the region had stolen from troops days earlier. They accused the farmers of collaborating with the rebels at the height of Guatemala's 36-year civil war.

The soldiers raped and killed women and girls and forced hundreds of people to flee, according to court filings. Dozens of bodies were exhumed from a well in the 1990s, and experts determined at least 67 were children under the age of 12.

During the 1960-96 civil war, more than 200,000 people, mostly Mayan Indians, were killed or went missing and entire villages were exterminated, according to the United Nations.

Rios Montt, who took power in a 1982 coup and was toppled the following year, became in January the first former president to be charged with genocide by a Latin American court. He had held immunity from prosecution while a member of Congress for 15 years, but after losing his seat he was put under house arrest, where he remains.

Advocates in Guatemala have said that charging Rios Montt for war crimes committed during his regime could stand as a precedent in the cases of two other former generals accused alongside Rios Montt in the first genocide case and of dozens of other lower-ranking military men accused of participating in atrocities.

