

Nobel Laureates Urge Guatemala to Restart Genocide Trial
By Adam Williams
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(SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA) – Seven Nobel Peace Prize laureates including Archbishop Desmond Tutu urged Guatemala’s judicial system to continue the genocide trial of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt after his case was halted last week.

Ríos Montt, 86, is being prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity during the Central American country’s 36-year civil war. The former dictator held de facto military power in Guatemala for 17 months from 1982-1983 and is accused of overseeing the killing of more than 1,700 indigenous Ixil Mayans while in power. Ríos Montt denies the charges.

The court was preparing to hear closing arguments last week when Judge Carol Patricia Flores, who was removed from the case in 2011 and reinstated this month after an appeal, said the case should be annulled and returned to the stage it was at when she was removed.

“The dark forces in the country that orchestrated the genocide are united and strong,” said Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú, who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, on a conference call organized by the Nobel Women’s Initiative. “Justice is the only way that we can dignify the victims, but currently we are facing a very complicated situation.”

During the trial, which began on March 19, dozens of Ixil Mayans testified against the former president, recounting stories of murder and rape, according to Kate Doyle, a senior analyst of U.S. policy in Latin America at the National Security Archive in Washington.

Flores’s ruling to vacate the trial is “a transparent effort to sabotage a case that was two or three days away from its conclusion,” Doyle said on the conference call.

The trial is stalled as Guatemala’s constitutional court rules on 12 legal challenges presented by civil parties and defense attorneys. A decision on the trial is expected in the coming days, Doyle said.

Other Nobel winners supporting the continuation of the trial are Jody Williams, José Ramos-Horta, Mairead Maguire, Shirin Ebadi and Leymah Gbowee.

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