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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

16 May 2013

**Guatemalan trial court finds Rios Montt guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity**

*Victims' organizations and human rights advocates welcome landmark decision, finally witnessing justice after 30 years of impunity*

**Lima, Peru/Guatemala City, Guatemala**—On 10 May 2013, Efraín Rios Montt, former *de facto* leader of Guatemala, was convicted on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity and sentenced to 80 years in prison by a Guatemalan court. The decision is historic for victims across the country, as the first ever rendered against a former head of state in a national court on charges of genocide, said the Coalition for the International Criminal Court.

*"This decision sends an important message not only to Guatemalans but also to the rest of Latin America and the world, which states that heinous crimes can no longer go unpunished," said Sandino Asturias, director of the Centro de Estudios de Guatemala and chair of the Guatemalan Coalition for the International Criminal Court. "Impunity will no longer be an ally of government practices and other actions that have been part of our recent history."*

Following Friday's decision, the civil parties requested reparations for victims, 12 of which were granted the following day, including measures of non-repetition; an official apology to the Maya Ixil ethnic group for the crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity, as well as an apology to Ixil women for the perpetration of sexual violence; among others. Following the conviction, the tribunal will deliver a full sentence on Friday, 17 May, which will include the specific measures on reparation.

The role of victims has been crucial during the whole process, which was highlighted by Coalition members *Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos*

(CIIDH) and *Seguridad en Democracia* (SEDEM), along with *Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos Guatemala* (UDEFEUGUA).

*"We salute the efforts carried out by victims and, in particular, would like to recognize their dignified, patient and exemplary attitude throughout this very lengthy process. We are thankful for their perseverance, their commitment to peace, and their strict adherence to the rule of law and pursuit of justice,"* **the groups said in a joint statement.**

In last Friday's decision, the trial court concluded that the Armed Forces in Guatemala, under the command of Rios Montt, had designed a plan with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Maya Ixil ethnic group. The evidence provided by the prosecution and the civil parties, or *querellantes*, in addition to the numerous testimonies provided by victims, witnesses and legal experts, proved beyond reasonable doubts that the Armed Forces carried out a number of criminal acts against the Ixil, including massacres, tortures, sexual violence and forced displacements. The tribunal thus found Rios Montt to be the intellectual author of the genocide, having had full knowledge of the actions being carried out against the Ixil and not having taken any measures to prevent such actions, despite having the power to do so.

In its ruling, the tribunal emphasized the nature and gravity of genocide, stating that "this crime affects all Guatemalans because it destroys the social fabric and is antithetical to social peace and justice".

Rios Montt ruled Guatemala between 1982 and 1983, one of the bloodiest according to the Truth Commission in Guatemala. His co-accused, Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez, who was head of military intelligence during Rios Montt's 17-month ruling, was acquitted of all charges.

Upon hearing the conviction, Rios Montt stated that his lawyers would continue to seek an annulment of the decision, alleging that his right to due process had been breached.

Throughout the trial, the Defense sought to obstruct justice and delay proceedings. One such action included an attempt by the judge who oversaw the case's preliminary phase to revert the case back to the point it was at in the preliminary phase in November 2011, the date in which she was recused from the case. The resolution of some legal remedies is still pending in order to allow the final decision to stand firm.

*"We call on the Guatemalan government to ensure protection and safety of victims, witnesses and human rights advocates as well as those members of the prosecution and judicial power who participated in this case. Furthermore, we call on all concerned to respect the right of victims to receive justice and of non-government organizations to promote justice without facing adverse consequences,"* **said Michelle Reyes Milk, Americas coordinator for the Coalition.** *"With this verdict, we see the mutually beneficial relationship between national and international justice. Every case is a building block to the world envisioned by victims, activists, committed governments, the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court, a world where grave crimes are investigated and prosecuted and those responsible held accountable."*

**Background:** *The ICC is the world's first permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Central to the Court's mandate is the principle of*

*complementarity, which holds that the Court will only intervene if national legal systems are unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. There are currently eight investigations before the Court: the Central African Republic; Cote d'Ivoire; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Darfur, the Sudan; Uganda; Kenya; Libya; and Mali. The ICC has publicly issued 22 arrest warrants and nine summonses to appear. The Court issued a judgment in its first trial on 14 March 2012. Two other trials are ongoing. The ICC Office of the Prosecutor has also made public that it is conducting seven preliminary examinations on four continents: Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Republic of Korea and Nigeria.*

*The Coalition for the International Criminal Court is a global network of civil society organizations in 150 countries working in partnership to strengthen international cooperation with the ICC; ensure that the Court is fair, effective and independent; make justice both visible and universal; and advance stronger national laws that deliver justice to victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. [www.coalitionfortheicc.org](http://www.coalitionfortheicc.org)*

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