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## **Doctor testifies that Salvadoran commanders knew of torture**

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) - A doctor told jurors he treated victims tortured by Salvadoran soldiers in 1979, months before he was also kidnapped and tortured for 22 days.

Dr. Juan Romagoza Arce was the first witness Monday in the federal civil trial of two former Salvadoran military commanders accused of letting soldiers under their command torture, rape and murder civilians.

"In spite of all the time that has passed, each time I tell the story, I feel that I am once again thrown on the floor naked, waiting for the next blow or wondering when the next electrical shock will come," Romagoza Arce said.

Romagoza Arce and two other victims, Carlos Mauricio, a science teacher, and Neris Gonzalez, the director of an environmental organization, are suing former Salvadoran Defense Minister Jose Guillermo Garcia and ex-National Guard Director-General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova under the 1992 federal Torture Victims Protection Act. Both defendants now live in retirement in Florida

It is the commanders second federal civil trial in West Palm Beach in two years. A jury in November 2000 found they could not be held responsible for soldiers raping and murdering four American churchwomen in 1980 because they did not have control over their men.

The victims in this trial do not need to prove the military leaders knew specifically they were being tortured. They only need to show that Garcia and Vides Casanova knew soldiers were committing atrocities and did nothing to prevent them.

Garcia, 68, of Plantation, and Vides Casanova, 64, of Daytona Beach, could be forced to pay millions if the jurors find them responsible.

"The generals systematically waged a war against unarmed civilians," victims' attorney James Green told jurors during opening statements.

Green said the generals did nothing as civilians were repeatedly tortured, sometimes as close as 150 feet from the commanders' offices. Green said they failed to take action against the abuse because they were trying to eliminate opposition to their military dictatorship.

"The military intimidated any group threatening their hold on power," he said.

The defense said it will give its opening statements after the victims present their case.

Romagoza Arce said he was shot in the foot in a Dec. 12, 1980, raid by soldiers on a rural

clinic. He said he was tortured for three weeks in a National Guard Headquarters cell in San Salvador because he was suspected of having leftist political leanings.

Romagoza Arce said he was sometimes hung up by his shoulders and knees with wire cables and forced to endure a steady drip of cold water on his abdomen. He said he was rarely fed and never permitted to use a toilet.

The former surgeon was shot in the left forearm by guards. Romagoza Arce said he was suspended from his finger tips with wire cable bound so tight that he permanently lost feeling in three of them.

"They told me that I would be marked for the rest of my life as a leftist and would never be able to help people (as a doctor) again," Romagoza Arce said. "They were right."

Romagoza Arce was released in January 1981 and escaped El Salvador's civil war several months later by hiding in bags of onions and salt destined for Guatemala. From there he crossed the border into Mexico and eventually into the United States, where he was granted political asylum in 1988. He now runs a Washington clinic for immigrants.

Under cross-examination, Kurt Klaus, a lawyer for Garcia and Vides Casanova, asked Romagoza Arce why he is suing now after previously failing to tell U.S. immigration officials of his accusations against the former commanders.

Romagoza Acre said that as a U.S. citizen, he believes in democracy and doesn't think human-rights violators like Garcia and Vides Casanova should be allowed to live free in this country.

"I am one of the few people who can tell the story. I am one of the few survivors," Romagoza Arce said. "It's not fair for me to stay silent."