

**MIAMI HERALD**

Posted on Fri, Jun. 28, 2002

## **Salvadoran testifies about torture, beating during trial of two former generals**

**LUISA YANEZ**

[lyanez@herald.com](mailto:lyanez@herald.com)

WEST PALM BEACH - Breaking down on the witness stand, a one-time Salvadoran professor testified Thursday about how he was kidnapped, beaten and tortured by his country's military 19 years ago -- an event that ended his academic career there and drove him into exile in the United States.

In detail, Carlos Mauricio, 50, told of his daytime kidnapping on a San Salvador street on June 13, 1983. He said he had been tricked to get out of his car, then grabbed by up to eight men.

One shoved a military boot into his face. Another struck him in the eye with a rifle butt, he said.

"I could do nothing," said the former agricultural science teacher at the national university of El Salvador.

In desperation, Mauricio said he grabbed the shiny bumper of a parked Volkswagen Beetle and screamed: ``Help me, please! Help me!"

No one did.

After 12 days of torture, questioning and incarceration in dark, roach-infested rooms and cells, he was released. By then he was a different man, he said.

To this day, Mauricio said he does not know what crime he could have committed. He did say he was an observer during his country's politically turbulent times in the early 1980s.

"I supported efforts to improve our government . . . and I wanted a peaceful solution," he said.

Now Mauricio is one of three who filed a federal civil lawsuit against two former Salvadoran generals. The suit alleges the ex-generals, now living in Florida, allowed their troops to run amok on the civilian population as the U.S.-backed ruling junta battled opposing factions, including leftist guerrillas.

As Mauricio told his story, defendants Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, 64, former head of the National Guard, and Jose Guillermo Garcia, 68, ex-minister of defense, sat stoically at the defense table, listening through earphones to a translation of Mauricio's testimony.

In a videotape deposition shown this week in court, Garcia has implied that Mauricio and the others were U.S.-hating subversives who are now trying to sound like ``martyrs and heroes."

It's not the first time the two former military men have been in court, accused of being responsible for alleged atrocities and killings by Salvadoran military forces.

Two years ago, a West Palm Beach jury found Vides Casanova, who lives in Daytona Beach, and Garcia, who lives in Plantation, not responsible for the 1980 kidnapping, rape and murder of four American church women, allegedly killed by soldiers.

#### FILING SUIT

Mauricio and the two other alleged victims want the jury to find the ex-generals responsible for allowing the abuse.

They have filed suit under the 1992 federal Torture Victims Protection Act. The effort is being led by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice & Accountability, a 4-year-old nonprofit group of lawyers that helps identify human rights abusers living in the United States.

The plaintiffs are being represented by James Green and Peter Stern.

#### DETAILED TESTIMONY

During his three hours on the stand, Mauricio told of how he was thrown into the van, blindfolded, handcuffed and driven around the city for two hours before arriving at a building he later recognized at the headquarters of the national police.

There, officers questioned him, mixing the inquiries about his involvement with the guerrillas with punches to the mouth and stinging slaps to the face. He said they also accused him of traveling to Cuba to be trained in leftist guerrilla warfare.

"I would have confessed just to make them stop," said Mauricio, who had not visited Cuba.

After eight days in what he called "the torture chamber" where others like him were also abused, Mauricio was moved to a cell with a dozen others.

An American Red Cross observer visited them, taking down names. That in effect saved their lives by documenting their detention, Mauricio said.

He was finally set free because the father of his former common-law wife was a member of the military and he intervened on Mauricio's behalf.

But his life was never the same.

Mauricio never went back to teaching university classes. Within three weeks, he left his country, headed for Mexico, then San Francisco, where a sister lives.

He is a high school science teacher there.

#### 'PART OF HEALING'

Under cross-examination by Klaus, Mauricio was asked why he had waited so long to seek legal action against the ex-generals.

Mauricio said he heard of the center's lawsuit from a friend and decided to join it.

He called it "part of my healing. I need an answer as to why I was detained and tortured, and I did nothing," said Mauricio.

``There is a need for justice in me. I'm looking to have my day in court."

Klaus asked Mauricio if he had reported the alleged incident to human rights organizations and a United Nations committee that came in to investigate military abuses in El Salvador. He had not, he said.

Also, once in the U.S., Mauricio applied for political asylum. His claim was rejected.

"You told them the same story you told here today?" Klaus asked.

"Yes," said Mauricio, who has resident alien status.

Mauricio is the second plaintiff to testify. On Monday, Juan Romagoza Arce, a doctor, claimed one of the defendants interrogated him between torture sessions in 1980.

A third defendant, Neris Gonzalez, has yet to testify. The trial in front of U.S. District Judge Daniel T.K. Hurley resumes Monday.