

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE CIRCULATION**

José Efraín Ríos Montt to face justice in Guatemala today

Lawyers Without Borders Canada Participates in the Historic Trial of the Former Head of State Accused of Genocide in Guatemala.

Guatemala City, Tuesday, March 19, 2013 – Today in Guatemala, the cases against former head of state and retired general José Efraín Ríos Montt, and former head of military intelligence, José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez will begin. At the centre of this historical process have been the efforts of Lawyers Without Borders Canada (LWBC) who have been working in support of the lawyers and civil society organizations representing the victims in these cases.

"Mr. Ríos Montt, at the head of a military regime, led the country from 1982 to 1983, where he perpetuated a "scorched earth" policy. The policy was enforced to eliminate the population of Mayan Ixil, wrongly suspected of supporting guerrillas. In executing this policy the regime would have killed more than 200,000 people in a series of massacres and unspeakable atrocities" said Pascal Paradis, Executive Director, Lawyers Without Borders Canada. Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez have both been accused of genocide and war crimes.

"This is a historic day for justice, not only in Guatemala but also internationally. It is indeed the first time a head of state is to stand trial for genocide before a national court. The law is being written before us. Regardless of the outcome, the fact that the trial has commenced is an extraordinary advance in the fight against impunity and the victims of injustice in the world." said Paradis.

The trial has been the result of a bitter legal battle led by the Guatemalan Public Prosecutor as well as a civil party representing the victims in this matter. *"Lawyers Without Borders Canada is proud to have lent a hand since 2009 to its main partners in Guatemala, the Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights (CALDH) and the Office of Human Rights in Guatemala (BDH), the groups who are representing the victims in this case."* said Paradis.

The LWBC Permanent Mission team in Guatemala as well as several other LWBC workers and volunteers have been working with the CALDH and BDH for months preparing evidence and arguments for the trial. Given the importance of timing, an additional team of cooperating volunteers was dispatched to Guatemala this week. LWBC also submitted to the court record a memorandum of argument against the Guatemalan amnesty law that would have the effect of allowing Mr. Ríos Montt to escape justice.

LWBC notes that this trial will be conducted in the wake of the massacre case involving the community of Las Dos Erres, where Mr. Ríos Montt has also been accused of being involved. On August 2, 2011 and March 12, 2012, a Guatemalan court sentenced five former soldiers with

severe penalties for torture, rape and murder of more than 200 non-combatant civilians (including pregnant women, infants and children) and crimes against humanity. LWBC also supported the work of the representatives of the plaintiff in this case.

"We hope that the trial will be held under fair conditions for all parties and that justice will be done in this emblematic case" said Paradis

– 30 –

About Lawyers Without Borders Canada : LWBC is a non-governmental organization whose mission is to defend the rights of the most vulnerable individuals or groups by enhancing access to justice and legal representation. Since 2009, LWBC has been working in Guatemala in order to improve and ensure quality and free legal representation to victims of gross human rights violations.

For more information:	Julie Dahan
Phone:	418 907-2607 ext 107
Email:	Julie.dahan@asfcanada.ca

.