



TRIAL
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PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Carlos Vielman's acquittal a worrying signal

Carlos Vielman, Guatemala's former Minister of Interior, has been acquitted. He has stood trial in January and February 2017 in Madrid, where his responsibility in the execution of eight detainees while he was holding office has been determined. His former wingman and Head of the National Police Erwin Serisen was sentenced by a Genevan tribunal to life imprisonment for the same facts. TRIAL International is concerned this acquittal sends a worrying signal to Guatemala's civil society.

On 15 March 2017, following several weeks of hearings and deliberation, the Madrid *Sala de lo penal de la Audiencia Nacional* has made public its decision to acquit Carlos Vielman, a dual citizen of Spain and Guatemala.

This decision follows the trials of some of his subordinates in Austria, Switzerland and Guatemala, for a series of extrajudicial executions committed while Carlos Vielman was Oscar Berger's Minister. Several have been condemned for these crimes, including Erwin Sperisen – who received a life sentence after a coalition of NGOs denounced him to the Swiss prosecuting authorities. It has also been the case for Víctor Soto Dieguez, condemned to 33 years' imprisonment in Guatemala, and of three other members of the Guatemalan public forces.

These cases have highlighted the existence of a criminal structure inside Oscar Berger's government, a fact that was also recognized by other instances – a UN commission (CICIG), a Guatemalan prosecutor in charge of human rights, Swiss and Guatemalan tribunals. In this context, the acquittal of Carlos Vielman sends a worrying signal, particularly in Guatemala where impunity still too often reigns supreme and human rights defenders witness a surge in intimidation practices and murders.

While the outcome of the trial is not what NGOs were hoping for, the fact that it took place is nonetheless a noteworthy step in the fight against impunity: *"This trial has proved that former Ministers are not above the law and must face their responsibilities"*, says **Philip Grant, Director of TRIAL International**.

At the time of this release, TRIAL International has not seen nor analyzed the detail of the decision. The NGO will therefore - for the moment - not further comment the reasons of the decision.

[Find out more about the Sperisen case](#)

TRIAL International is a non-governmental organization fighting impunity for international crimes and supporting victims in their quest for justice. TRIAL International takes an innovative approach to the law, paving the way to justice for survivors of unspeakable sufferings. The organization provides legal assistance, litigates cases, develops local capacity and pushes the human rights agenda forward.

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