

April 2025

# FAQs

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

---

Answers to frequently asked questions about the case of top former Salvadoran Military Officers for the **1982 murder of four Dutch reporters in Chalatenango**

Co-developed by



In collaboration with



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR



**Who are the accused in this case?**



The accused in this case are [top former Salvadoran military officers](#), namely the former commander of the Fourth Infantry Brigade of El Paraíso, Colonel Mario Reyes Mena (hereafter: Colonel Reyes Mena), former Minister of Defense and Strongman of the Salvadoran Army in the early 1980s, General José Guillermo García (hereafter: General García), and former head of the repealed Treasury Police (Policía de Hacienda), Francisco Antonio Morán (hereafter: Colonel Morán).

The arrest warrants for the accused were issued on [October 13, 2024](#), by the judge of the court in Dulce Nombre de María, Chalatenango, El Salvador, after the judge found sufficient grounds to prosecute the accused for the murder of four Dutch reporters: **Jan Kuiper** (editor), **Koos Koster** (coordinating correspondent), **Johannes “Joop” Willemsen** (cameraman), and **Hans ter Laag** (soundman) on March 17, 1982, during the civil war in El Salvador. In addition to the three men mentioned above, the Court [also](#) ordered the arrest of former head of the General Staff, Colonel Rafael Flores Lima (hereafter: General Flores Lima), and Sergeant of the Atonal Battalion, Mario Canizales Espinoza (hereafter: Sergeant Canizales Espinoza). However, General Flores Lima and Sergeant Canizales Espinoza have [passed away](#).

# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR



**What was the civil war in El Salvador?**



**Since the late 1960s**, El Salvador was characterized by deepening poverty and social and economic inequality. A small, wealthy elite oppressed the population with extreme repression. Among other things, the popular protests that arose in response to this oppression eventually escalated into a civil war that lasted approximately from **1980 to January 1992**. The [civil war in El Salvador](#) was an internal armed conflict between the government army, supported by the United States (hereafter: U.S.), and a coalition of five left-wing guerrilla units, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (hereafter: FMLN).

The war was characterized by extreme violence, including massacres, disappearances, and [widespread human rights violations](#), with civilians being the primary victims. The Salvadoran government – or their allies – were often involved in the [abduction, torture, murder, and forced disappearances of people](#), particularly those that were political opponents. It is [estimated](#) that 85 percent of the violence during the war was attributed to the right-wing government military forces, which were supported by the U.S. out of fear of communism, while the leftist rebels were responsible for 5 percent of the violence.

After 12 years of fighting and [approximately 75,000 deaths and 8,000 'disappeared' people](#), the [Chapultepec Peace Accords](#) were signed in January 1992. This agreement transformed the FMLN into a political party and reformed the army. The civil war had a devastating impact on El Salvador, leaving deep scars in society.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR



**What exactly happened on March 1982?**

**A**

On **March 11, 1982**, the director of the Treasury Police, Colonel Francisco Antonio Morán, ordered Koos Koster to be taken to the Treasury Police headquarters for interrogation. His colleagues Jan Kuiper, Joop Willemsen, and Hans ter Laag accompanied him. The reporters were working for the Dutch public broadcaster IKON (Interkerkelijke Omroep Nederland) and were reporting on the impact of the war on the lives of Salvadoran civilians. Upon returning to the hotel where they were staying, they discovered that their rooms and work materials had been searched by law enforcement. Salvadoran security forces considered IKON's independent journalistic work a threat for its [critical journalism](#). The reporters continued their work on the production of a documentary that sought to portray the lives of Salvadoran families in urban and rural areas. On **March 17, 1982**, in Santa Rita, Chalatenango, the reporters were ambushed and killed by a patrol from the Atonal Battalion of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. Four guerrilla guides were also killed at the same ambush site. Only one guide survived; he gave his testimony to the Dutch authorities.

For more information on this case and other cases considered crimes against humanity and included in the Truth Commission Report, you can access the specialized [website](#) "The Ambush," where you can also read the [book](#) that delves into the case of the four Dutch reporters. This website offers content in Spanish, English, and Dutch.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**Q** What specific charges have been brought against the accused?

**A** The judge in the case, in a ruling, ordered the defendants to be held in pretrial detention for the crime of [murder](#), as defined in the Salvadoran Penal Code of 1973/74. This law is no longer in force, but it remains applicable in this case.

**Q** Why did it take so much time to file the case?

**A** After the end of the civil war in 1992, the government of El Salvador introduced a [general amnesty law](#) for state security forces and guerrilla fighters. This law, issued 20th March 1993, protected these groups from investigation and prosecution for human rights violations. Amnesty laws are common [after wars or political conflicts](#) and are seen by supporters as a transitional justice tool to promote national reconciliation and stability, but they are also controversial. When amnesty laws result in impunity for human rights violators, they prevent justice for the victims and/or survivors. The Salvadoran amnesty law also protected the murderers of the Dutch reporters from prosecution for their actions.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**A** However, on **13<sup>th</sup> of July 2016**, the Constitutional Chamber of the [Salvadoran Supreme Court](#) declared the amnesty law unconstitutional. The Chamber [stated](#) that *'amnesty violates the right to access to justice and the right to full compensation for victims of crimes against humanity or war crimes that violate international human rights.'*

As a result, investigations into the case of the Dutch reporters began in 2018 after Fundación Comunicándonos and the Salvadoran Association for Human Rights (ASDEHU), accompanied by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Costa Rica for Central America, filed the criminal complaint with the Attorney General's Office (FGR in Spanish). A criminal case is currently underway in El Salvador.



**What is the broader significance of this case?**

**A** According to **Fundación Comunicándonos** and **ASDEHU**, which represent the families of the four Dutch reporters, [this trial](#) is "the most significant step in the search for truth and justice for the victims and their families, as well as for the Salvadoran people and the people of the Netherlands." This is because it will be the first case included in the United Nations Truth Commission Report to reach the trial stage, and because it will bring to trial former senior military officers of the Armed Forces.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**A** An exemplary sentence in the case of the Dutch reporters would guarantee truth and justice for their families and the people of the Netherlands, in addition to setting an important precedent for moving forward in other cases that remain unpunished.

According to **Claret Vargas**, Senior Staff Attorney of the human rights organization The Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), the murder of the Dutch reporters is recognized by the [1992 UN Truth Commission on El Salvador](#) as 'among the most emblematic crimes committed during the civil war in El Salvador.'

The right to freedom of expression is an internationally recognized human right, as enshrined in, among others, [Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR). The right to freedom of expression encompasses, among other things, the 'freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers...'. This also includes freedom of the press for reporters. This freedom of the press continues to be under pressure in El Salvador, and the case of the murder of the Dutch reporters highlights the [ongoing issue of state violence](#) against journalists in the country: to this day, journalists in El Salvador work under [difficult conditions](#), often forced into self-censorship and facing limitations and threats. This particular trial, as it touches on these core human rights, is significant in a country where violations of freedom of the press often go [unpunished](#). It is also important because it may make it easier to address other crimes committed during the war: it sets a path towards broader justice and accountability. An eventual conviction would also contribute to healing for the



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**A** victims' families and send a crucial signal that human rights violations will no longer go unpunished in El Salvador.

Despite the UN Truth Commission report and several IACHR cases (like the [Case of the massacre of El Mozote and nearby place v. El Salvador](#)) condemning the state of El Salvador for numerous severe human rights violations committed during the conflict, there have been no genuine attempts before in El Salvador to investigate the crimes, or prosecute those most responsible for them. This case is emblematic also because it looks at the alleged criminal responsibility of two senior officials in El Salvador for crimes committed during the conflict. This case has the potential to resonate with the community of Santa Rita and more broadly with Salvadoran society.

Fundación Comunicándonos and ASDEHU, together with the families and friends of the four Dutch reporters, have [built](#) the "Tulips of Hope" Memorial Site in Santa Rita, Chalatenango, El Salvador. The four Dutch reporters were last seen alive at this [location](#). On October 24, 2024, the Memorial Site was [inaugurated](#) with the participation of the Netherlands Ambassador to Costa Rica for Central America, the embassy's Human Rights Policy Officer, and a large turnout of residents of Santa Rita and other locations in El Salvador.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR



**What details can you share about the investigation process leading up to this trial?**



[The Dutch War Crimes Unit](#) (DWCU, - Team Internationale Misdrijven TIM) is carrying out its own investigation into the case since 2013, and has transferred evidence gathered during the investigation to the Salvadoran authorities. Meanwhile, in El Salvador, on March 13, 2018, Fundación Comunicádonos and ASDEHU, in the presence of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica for Central America (represented by the former Ambassador and the Human Rights Policy Officer), filed a criminal complaint with the Attorney General's Office (FGR) to request the reopening of the case. This complaint was filed on behalf of Gert Kuiper and Saskia ter Laag. It wasn't until March 17, 2021, that the FGR decided to [prosecute](#) the case under the 1973/74 Criminal Procedure Code. In 2022, Sonja ter Laag also made a statement about the case before the Dulce Nombre de María court.

The [1992 UN Truth Commission](#) investigation into the murders in El Salvador had already revealed that Colonel Reyes Mena and Colonel Morán, along with Sergeant Canizales Espinoza, were responsible for planning the ambush and the murders of the four reporters. General García and General Flores Lima are charged with omission (negligence) in connection with the murders, while Colonel Reyes Mena, Colonel Morán, and Sergeant Canizales are charged as indirect perpetrators in connection with the murders, [according to a court ruling](#).



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**A** Following the arrest warrant, General García and Colonel Morán were [arrested](#) on October 14, 2022, at their homes in San Salvador and are being held in [provisional detention](#) at a private hospital due to their health conditions and age, awaiting their trial in El Salvador.

The court also ordered the arrest of Colonel Reyes Mena. In 2018, Dutch investigative journalists from the television program [Zembla](#) discovered that Colonel Reyes Mena had been living in the U.S. since 1984, two years after the murder. Colonel Reyes Mena [told](#) Zembla: 'The case has been investigated, I have never been charged. You are all part of a communist plan to take revenge.'

Despite a Salvadoran indictment against him and an [INTERPOL Red Notice](#) for his provisional arrest, and the Supreme Court of El Salvador [authorizing](#) his extradition, Colonel Reyes Mena has not yet been extradited to El Salvador.

For this reason, the CJA, along with the U.S. law firm [Jenner & Block LLP](#) and in collaboration with Salvadoran civil society organizations [Fundación Comunicándonos](#) and [Asociación Salvadoreña por los Derechos Humanos](#) (ASDEHU), filed a [civil claim](#) in a federal court in Virginia (the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia) against Colonel Reyes Mena for his alleged role in the murder of Jan Kuiper. The case was filed on behalf of Gert Kuiper, the brother of the victim, under the [Torture Victim Protection Act](#). This [Act](#) allows the families of victims of extrajudicial executions abroad to seek justice from perpetrators, provided that the perpetrators fall within the jurisdiction of a U.S. court. In the case of Colonel Reyes Mena, the Act applies, as he resides in Virginia. The lawsuit in the U.S.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**A** against Colonel Reyes Mena, which is still ongoing, does not directly impact the [ongoing criminal case](#) in El Salvador against General García and Colonel Morán, nor will it affect any [potential extradition](#) of Colonel Reyes Mena to El Salvador. It is possible, however, that the evidence presented during the trial could be used by the immigration authorities of the U.S. to deport Colonel Reyes Mena, as has been shown in previous CJA cases. The full complaint filed on behalf of Gert Kuiper can be read [here](#).

**Q** **When is the trial scheduled to commence?**

**A** The trial of General García, Colonel Morán, and Colonel Reyes Mena is scheduled for **9 a.m. on April 23, 2025**, at the **Judicial Center in Chalatenango, El Salvador**.

**Q** **What role do The Nuhanovic Foundation and REDRESS play in this case?**

**A** The Nuhanovic Foundation (NF) and REDRESS are working jointly to provide support to some of the victims' families during the public trial phase in El Salvador. NF and REDRESS are facilitating the families' access to proceedings and liaising with their lawyer. In collaboration with Fundación Comunicándonos and ASDEHU, we are looking to increase visibility and amplify awareness of the case, domestically and internationally.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## THE 4 DUTCH REPORTERS' CASE IN EL SALVADOR

**Q Which other organizations do The Nuhanovic Foundation and REDRESS collaborate with regarding this case?**

**A** The Nuhanovic Foundation is specifically working with the [DWCU](#), which led the investigation into the murder in the Netherlands. Additionally, The Nuhanovic Foundation and REDRESS collaborate with [Fundación Comunicándonos](#) and [ASDEHU](#). The Nuhanovic Foundation and REDRESS are supported by the [United against Torture Consortium](#).

**Q How to stay up-to-date with the latest case information?**

**A** You can follow Fundación Comunicándonos' social media accounts and website to stay up-to-date on the latest developments related to the criminal case in El Salvador.





## The Nuhanovic Foundation

Supporting victims and survivors of international crimes through litigation, advocacy and knowledge.

Amsterdam Law Hub  
Nieuwe Achtergracht 164  
1018 WV Amsterdam

[www.nuhanovicfoundation.org](http://www.nuhanovicfoundation.org)  
[mail@nuhanovicfoundation.org](mailto:mail@nuhanovicfoundation.org)

**IBAN:** NL13 INGB 0008365357

**KvK:** 52769240

**SWIFT:** INGBNL2A

Ending torture, seeking justice for survivors

## REDRESS

Unit G01, 65 Glasshill Street  
SE1 0QR, London, UK

[www.redress.org](http://www.redress.org)  
[info@redress.org](mailto:info@redress.org)