NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Judge's ruling opens door for deportation of retired Salvadoran general

Dennis Sadowski Catholic News Service | Feb. 27, 2012

WASHINGTON -- Family and friends of four American churchwomen murdered in 1980 welcomed a Florida immigration judge's decision that paves the way for the deportation of a former Salvadoran defense minister found to have a role in their killings.

James Kazel, brother of Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel of Cleveland, said the expected deportation to El Salvador of Gen. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova was "past due as far as I'm concerned."

"He got away with murder and got away with living in the United States," Kazel told Catholic News Service from his home in Avon, Ohio. "He didn't deserve to be here."

Vides, who served as defense minister from 1983 to 1989 before retiring and moving to Florida, commanded the Salvadoran National Guard in December 1980 when the women were murdered by guardsmen along a rural road outside the capital, San Salvador.

Five guardsmen were convicted of the killings in 1984 and served long jail sentences.

"Justice moves kind of slow in the U.S., but we finally got our mission accomplished," Kazel said. "It was a thing that everybody from the families was waiting for."

The Feb. 23 decision by Judge James Grim of an immigration court in Orlando marks the first time federal prosecutors established that a high-ranking foreign military leader can be deported for violating human rights. Grim found there was enough evidence to deport Vides for his role in the murder and torture of civilians. The decision was based on a 2004 law that prevents foreign officials from living in the United States if they were tied to such violations.

The judge found that Vides assisted in the murders of Sister Dorothy, Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke and lay volunteer Jean Donovan of Cleveland. The women were kidnapped, raped and killed on a rural road before being buried in a shallow grave.

Their killings at the beginning of the civil war, which eventually claimed 70,000 lives, shocked American officials and church leaders. The U.S. had backed the military-led government in its fight against leftist guerillas.

Sister Mary Ellen Brinovec, a member of the leadership team of the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, called the judge's decision encouraging.

"After 32 years we feel a sense of gratitude that the truth of their deaths is now beginning to come to light," Sister Mary Ellen said. "This is an encouraging first step toward justice and healing and reconciliation for all involved."

The Maryknoll Sisters said in a statement that the court's decision was "an effort to uphold the values of justice and respect for human dignity. It signals an end to impunity for those who abuse their power."

Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez of San Salvador said Grim's decision serves as a tribute to the women.

"We must get to the truth and justice in an attitude of reconciliation, not revenge," he added.

Vides and Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, also a former Salvadoran defense minister living in Florida, were freed of responsibility for the killings after a jury trial in 2000. But in 2002 they were found guilty in a civil trial for the torture of three Salvadorans. They were ordered to pay $54.6 million to the victims.

That ruling was taken into account by Grim in his ruling against the general.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-30 00:15*): http://www.ncronline.org/news/global/judges-ruling-opens-door-deportation-retired-salvadoran-general