News



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The University of Dayton, a Catholic school in Ohio, plans to present its Romero Human Rights Award April 11 to three individuals who have worked to investigate those responsible for the El Mozote Massacre during El Salvador's civil war and ensure that they are prosecuted.

According to a press release from the university, David Morales from Cristosal will receive the award alongside Ovidio Mauricio Gonzalez and Wilfredo Medrano from Tutela Legal. The University of Dayton Human Rights Center selected the recipients.

Morales, who earlier served as the human rights ombudsman for the Salvadoran government, is now head of Cristosal’s Observatory on Forced Displacement by Violence covering El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. According to the press release, Cristosal's mission is to promote human rights in Central America through "rights-based research, learning, and programming."

Tutela Legal is a human rights agency that collected and organized stories and evidence during El Salvador's civil war from 1979 to 1992. Originally connected with the Archdiocese of San Salvador, it continues to focus on issues of state violence, promoting justice and accountability.

For over two years, all three honorees have been engaged in a struggle to hold those who ordered the El Mozote Massacre accountable in the Salvadoran courts. According to Salvadoran government data, during the Dec. 11, 1981 massacre, units of the Atlacatl Battalion, trained at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, murdered nearly 1,000 civilians, including 553 children, 80 percent of them under age 12.

The Romero Human Rights Award is named after St. Oscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador who spoke out against violence and oppression during the beginning of the Salvadoran Civil War and was assassinated March 24, 1980.

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Established in 2000, the award honors individuals and organizations that promote human dignity and combat human suffering and injustice. Past recipients include The Pastoral Land Commission of the Brazilian National Bishops’ Conference (2007), the U.S. bishops' conference's Migration and Refugee Services (2010) and Radhika Coomaraswamy, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (2004).

The award itself is a bronze statue sculpted by Emily Trick (University of Dayton class of 2000) and Marianist Br. Gary Marcinowski, of the University of Dayton's Department of Visual Arts.

Ahead of the 6 p.m. award ceremony, the Human Rights Center will host a symposium "discussing the links between past and current violence in Latin America and the rights of migrants and asylum seekers in the United States." The event is free and open to the public.

Speakers include Ashley Feasley, director of policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migrant and Refugee Services; Linda Rivas, executive director and managing attorney at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center; Craig Hovey, director of the Ashland Center for Nonviolence and University of Dayton Human Rights Center visiting scholar; and Dayton activist and artist Gabriella Piquett.

A reception after the ceremony will feature "America the Borderland," a new exhibit created by University of Dayton students who traveled in May 2018 to El Paso, Texas, to photograph and interview local migrant rights leaders for the Moral Courage Project.