News



A bishop at the Centro Romero in San Salvador on Jan. 18, 2022, looks at a display of clothes the Jesuits and their housekeepers were wearing when they were murdered in 1989. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)



by Rhina Guidos

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August 9, 2023

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The archbishop of El Salvador's capital city announced Aug. 6 that a canonization process has begun for a group of martyrs killed during the country's bloody civil war, including Jesuit Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, the rector of the Catholic university who was murdered in 1989.

"Our Episcopal Conference has started the process of canonization of a large group of our martyrs from the recent armed conflict suffered in our country," said San Salvador Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas.

Ellacuría was the only name mentioned, but he was one of six Jesuit priests who were murdered on Nov. 16, 1989, on the campus of the University of Central America in San Salvador, where they taught. Their housekeeper and her teen daughter also were killed with them. They became part of the more than 75,000 killed during El Salvador's armed conflict during the 1970s and 1980s.

Many of the Jesuit scholars killed were outspoken critics of the government and of its repression against the poor. Ellacuría, a noted philosopher, gave the 1982 commencement address at California's Santa Clara University saying universities, particularly those that are Christian, should be at the service of the poor, speaking in defense of the poor, lending their services, and merging knowledge scholars learn there with faith.

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In the U.S., the Ignatian Solidarity Network follows much of this philosophy as it hosts an annual gathering of students from Catholics high schools and universities in Washington that takes place around the anniversary of the killing of the Jesuits. Students discuss how to help the poor and other matters of social justice and human rights. It ends with a visit to lawmakers at the U.S. Capitol to advocate for those causes.

The organization welcomed the announcement.

"The Ignatian Solidarity Network is deeply moved by Archbishop Escobar Alas' announcement that the Salvadoran bishops conference will initiate the process of canonization for individuals martyred during the country's civil war. In addition, we are heartened by his direct reference to Fr. Ellacuría," said Christopher Kerr, the group's executive director, on its website Aug. 8. "Father Ellacuría, S.J.,'s ministry throughout his life and martyrdom serve as a prophetic witness of the Gospel vision of justice and peace."

Following the announcement in San Salvador, Jesuit Fr. José María Tojeira, who knew the murdered men, told the Salvadoran newspaper El Diario de Hoy that he and other companions believed a canonization cause would take place "sooner or later."

"We're happy that it has started," he told the newspaper. "From what I understand from the archbishop in meetings, the eight are included in the beatification process that includes a good number of those who gave their lives for peace and justice in the country."

Housekeeper Elba Ramos, and her 15-year-old daughter Celina, along with Jesuit Frs. Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramón Moreno, Joaquín López y López, and Amando López were killed along with Ellacuría.

Though it's been difficult to hold accountable anyone in El Salvador for crimes committed during the war, Spain in 2020, successfully prosecuted a former member of the Salvadoran military in at least five of the eight murders involving the Jesuits. Since some of the priests had Spanish citizenship, Spain's top criminal court took up the case and convicted Inocente Orlando Montano, El Salvador's former public security vice minister, to 133 years in prison for the crimes committed against the priests with Spanish citizenship. His appeals have been denied.

A version of this story appeared in the **Sept 1-14, 2023** print issue under the headline: Jesuit Fr. Ellacuría among martyrs El Salvador is setting on sainthood path.