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Ex-soldiers indicted for deaths of Jesuits surrender

by Catholic News Service

SAN SALVADOR (CNS) -- Nine former soldiers in El Salvador's army have surrendered to authorities, three months after their indictment in Spain for the 1989 killings of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter during the country's 12-year civil war.

The ex-military members turned themselves in at a military base Aug. 8 and were transported to a Salvadoran court, the government said.

They were among 20 former soldiers indicted by a Spanish court for their role in the deaths on the campus of the University of Central America in the Salvadoran capital, where the priests taught and lived.

Five of the priests were Spanish. Spain's courts have used the principle of international jurisdiction to prosecute the killings.

Gen. Rene Emilio Ponce, the army leader accused of ordering the killings, died in May before the Spanish indictments were handed down.

El Salvador's government said in a statement that the former soldiers surrendered as authorities prepared to arrest them on an international warrant issued by Interpol. It was not clear whether the Salvadoran Supreme Court would permit their extradition to Spain.

The Central American country's civil war ended in 1992 under an agreement mediated by the United Nations between the government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. An estimated 70,000 people died during the conflict.

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