

# **Bloody era haunts jailed Peruvian ex-president**

**A massacre that left 15 dead in 1991 could be Alberto Fujimori's biggest legal challenge now that the ex-president has been extradited to Peru.**

The Miami Herald  
Sep. 24, 2007

LIMA --

Late one Sunday night nearly 16 years ago, a half-dozen men carrying machine guns equipped with silencers burst into the interior patio of a squalid tenement building here and opened fire on 20 people at a chicken barbecue.

When the masked men drove off, 15 people lay dead, including an 8-year-old boy, and four more were badly wounded.

"I was shot right in that corner," Tomás Livias said Sunday, pointing to the spot where he was shot 27 times and left to die. "I will remember that night until I die."

Former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori was extradited from Chile on Saturday, and perhaps the most serious accusation he faces is that he sanctioned the paramilitary death squad that carried out two massacres of ordinary Peruvians.

One was the slaughter that left Livias in a wheelchair. It is known in Peru as the Barrios Altos case, after the neighborhood where the killings occurred on Nov. 3, 1991.

The other case is known as La Cantuta for the teachers' college where one professor and nine students were abducted and murdered at night on July 18, 1992. Their bodies were found a year later in a common grave.

The Barrios Altos and La Cantuta cases carry 30-year sentences, or enough to put the 69-year-old Fujimori in prison for the rest of his life.

Fujimori began to prepare his defense by meeting with attorneys on Sunday at the police base in Lima where he is imprisoned.

Doctors were monitoring his health because Fujimori suffered from a sharp drop in blood pressure on Saturday while being flown from Chile to Peru and then hypertension Sunday morning. His supporters were out in force Sunday proclaiming his innocence.

Alejandro Toledo, who helped force Fujimori out of office in 2000 with a strong presidential campaign before going on to win the 2001 election, voiced the concern of many Peruvians in questioning whether the country's Supreme Court can try Fujimori without political interference.

"The eyes of the world" will be on the court, Toledo told The Miami Herald, noting that Asian Pacific summit will bring President Bush and other world leaders to Peru in 2008.

Fujimori is facing charges that he bribed congressmen and journalists to gain their support, kidnapped critics of his regime, bought the silence of Vladimiro Montesinos, his chief political and military advisor, with \$15 million of taxpayers' money, and sanctioned the 25 murders in the Barrios Altos and La Cantuta cases.

The butchery was the work of the Colina Group, comprised of government security agents with the mission of striking at members or sympathizers of the Shining Path, a leftist guerrilla group then terrorizing Peru.

### **AMNESTY OVERTURNED**

Santiago Martín Rivas, the army major who led the Colina Group, and 10 other security agents were found guilty of the killings in 1994. They were court-martialed, but freed a year later as part of a general amnesty sought by Fujimori for those guilty of human rights crimes. Rivas is back in prison after the amnesty was overturned.

Prosecutors and human rights lawyers readily say they have no evidence that Fujimori ordered the Barrios Altos and La Cantuta massacres. But they maintain he was the intellectual author of the bloodshed.

Fujimori has repeatedly proclaimed his innocence.

The evidence in both cases is circumstantial.

Rivas said in an interview published in 2003 that Montesinos had formed the group with Fujimori's approval. He did not provide specific evidence tying the ex-president to the crimes.

"The object of the Barrios Altos operation was not to capture terrorists," Rivas said in the interview, published in the book *Eye to Eye*. "The objective was to send an overwhelming message to the Shining Path."

No evidence has emerged linking the Barrios Altos victims to the Shining Path; it was apparently a case of mistaken identity.

In testimony before the Supreme Court, Rivas said Fujimori congratulated him and others who led the Colina Group for their efforts fighting the Shining Path and recommended that they be promoted.

Nicolás Hermoza, the top general under Fujimori, has testified that Fujimori was appraised of the operations at Barrios Altos and La Cantuta because he worked and slept at the headquarters of the National Intelligence Service, the hub of anti-guerrilla efforts.

One of the SUVs used by the Colina Group at Barrios Altos had been used previously to transport Santiago Fujimori, the former president's brother, said Francisco Soberón, who heads APRODEH, a Peruvian human rights group.

Tomás Livias was a 32-year-old ice-cream vendor on the streets of Barrios Altos in 1991 when friends invited him to a cookout at 840 Huanta St., five blocks behind Peru's Congress building.

### **MASKED GUNMEN**

Livias said he was standing in the 400-square-foot patio when he saw an SUV pull up outside and masked men rush toward him.

Livias thought they might be Shining Path guerrillas.

The members of the Colina Group ordered everyone on the ground -- screaming that they were calling them wretched terrorists -- and started firing.

Livias was unhurt because two others collapsed dead on him.

He got up amid the carnage a couple of minutes later and went to find his girlfriend. Instead, he said, he ran into Rivas, who knocked him down with a rifle butt and then shot him repeatedly. Somehow Livias survived. He spent three years recovering in the hospital. "Only half of my body works," he said Sunday.

Livias said he welcomed Fujimori's return to Peru.

"Sooner or later you have to pay your debts to society," he said. "Sooner or later justice will prevail."