

Peru's Fujimori says innocent of murder charges

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LIMA (Reuters) - Former President Alberto Fujimori angrily denied ordering death squads to kill suspected leftists in Peru's civil war as he went on trial on Monday, and said he saved the country from the threat of communism.

"I reject the charges entirely. I'm innocent," Fujimori shouted angrily while pointing at a panel of three Supreme Court judges.

Fujimori, 69, is accused of sending a military death squad to carry out the La Cantuta massacre, in which 10 people were snatched from a university, murdered and buried in a shallow grave in 1992 for allegedly collaborating with left-wing guerrillas.

He is also on trial for two kidnappings and the Barrios Altos murders in 1991, when 15 people were gunned down at a family barbecue, among them an eight-year-old boy.

The normally composed Fujimori appeared tense from the trial's opening session and exploded when allowed to respond to the charges.

"As a result of my government, the human rights of 25 million Peruvians are respected," Fujimori yelled. "If there were exceptions, I condemn them, but I didn't not order them."

A judge told him to calm down and the afternoon's proceedings were canceled when a court doctor said Fujimori was suffering from symptoms of "chronic hypertension."

Fujimori faces up to 30 years in prison and \$33 million in fines if found guilty. The trial is at a police barracks where the former president is being held and is scheduled to resume on Wednesday.

Fujimori took power in 1990 when a Maoist insurgency known as the Shining Path was trying to take over the Andean country.

His supporters say it is unfair to prosecute a man who ended the vicious guerrilla war and tamed a chaotic economy during his decade-long rule.

TURNING POINT

But human rights activists view the televised trial as a turning point in a country long hobbled by a weak judicial system, impunity for the powerful, and painful memories of a civil war that killed tens of thousands of people.

Prosecutors rejected Fujimori's legal arguments that he was not in charge of the military's Colina counter-insurgency team that led the massacres.

"There was a clear chain of command from Fujimori to the executioners of the Colina group, whose central mission was the physical elimination of presumed subversives," said government prosecutor Jose Antonio Pelaez.

Families of victims who disappeared in the massacres pushed for the trial for years and are calling for a tough sentence.

Outside the courtroom, supporters and critics rallied and riot police scuffled with both sides to prevent clashes.

"Trial and punishment for Fujimori!" read a banner of Peru's largest union confederation, which had some 200 members rallying to demand Fujimori be convicted.

"Fujimori is innocent!" "Liberty for Fujimori!" shouted his supporters, waving orange flags, the color of his Alliance for the Future Party.

Fujimori was extradited to Peru from Chile in September after seven years in exile, five of them in [Japan](#), the country of his parents' birth.

Around 70,000 Peruvians died or disappeared in fighting and massacres between the military, the Shining Path, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, and peasants in poor mountain towns during 20 years of conflict that broke out in 1980.

Most were killed before Fujimori took office in 1990, and the violence faded after Fujimori's forces captured the Shining Path's supreme leader Abimael Guzman in 1992.