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U.S. must assist in bringing Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and accomplices to justice

In September and October of 2003, the administration of President Gonzalo “Goni” Sanchez de Lozada ordered the military to put down popular protests in El Alto over the exportation of gas from Bolivia. The troops killed 67 people, including several children, by firing into the crowds and using sharpshooters. Hundreds of people were injured, including many who lost limbs or their eyesight. An official decree signed by Sanchez de Lozada and all of his cabinet shows that the government assumed all responsibility for any damages done. Days after the massacre, Sanchez de Lozada and two of his ministers fled to the U.S. where they have remained ever since. The former Bolivian president has been living a mere ten minutes away from the White House in Chevy Chase, MD.

The Bolivian Supreme Court will soon send an official request for the extradition of Sanchez de Lozada and two of his former ministers, Carlos Sánchez Berzaín and Jorge Berindoague Alcócer who have been living in Key Biscayne, FL and Moraga, CA respectively. The U.S. government should respect its extradition treaty with Bolivia and extradite the three men expeditiously. This represents an excellent opportunity for the U.S. government to show its respect for the rule of law and its desire to end impunity in Latin America. Below are some points brought up by the Comité Impulsor, an association composed of victims of the October 2003 violence and families of those killed.

1) The United States government has no right to obstruct or interfere with the Bolivian judicial process. Sanchez de Lozada’s guilt or innocence should be decided by his peers in a court of law in his home country, where the crimes took place, not by the U.S. State Department.

- The crimes for which Sanchez de Lozada is to be tried occurred in Bolivia. The victims were all Bolivians. The United States government is not and should not be involved in the case, other than to respect Bolivian law, honor its bilateral extradition treaty with Bolivia, and recognize the rights of the victims to face the accused in court. This means the extradition of Sanchez de Lozada and his former ministers to appear in court.
- A notification for Sanchez de Lozada’s presence in court was sent to the U.S. in 2005, but was ignored despite the fact that the Bolivian Supreme Court obeyed all Bolivian and international laws in emitting the notification.
- The extradition request will not proclaim Sanchez de Lozada guilty. It simply requires his presence in the courts, so a fair trial can be held to decide his guilt or innocence.
- By failing to return Sanchez de Lozada to the Bolivian courts to stand trial, the United States is allowing Goni to flout the legal process in his country and avoid facing the trial against him.

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2) **Sanchez de Lozada is NOT being politically persecuted. He is being called to stand trial for involvement in the massacres of September and October of 2003 during which he was president.**

- Those at a high level in government must be questioned when such a tragic incident of state violence occurs. This is not political persecution, but standard investigative procedure in most places for such situations.
- To process high elected officials in Bolivia requires a special procedure called a Trial of Responsibility. The request for this investigation was initiated by Sanchez de Lozada's former vice president, passed by a 2/3rds vote in Congress, which was dominated by Sanchez de Lozada's party and allied parties. The request was also passed by the Supreme Court, most of whom had been appointed by Sanchez de Lozada and other party members. All of this took place before Evo Morales was elected.
- Sanchez de Lozada fled Bolivia to the U.S. immediately following the massacres, where he has remained. He has never submitted himself to questioning regarding the events (something which almost all those involved of the protest have now done, including Evo Morales and other social movement leaders). The current Evo Morales government has guaranteed Sanchez de Lozada's protection should he return for trial. In no way would the ex-President be putting his life at risk by returning to stand trial for the crimes for which he is accused.

3) **Holding Sanchez de Lozada responsible for his actions is part of a larger picture: fighting against the impunity of Latin American dictators, militaries, and even "democratically elected" presidents that have been perpetrating acts of extreme violence against their people for decades.**

- Sanchez de Lozada and his lawyers have been using legal loopholes to stall the process against them since it began nearly three years ago, in order to avoid having to face trial. What does resorting to such methods say about his respect for democracy and legality?
- By forcing corrupt, violent leaders like Sanchez de Lozada to take responsibility for their crimes, Bolivia can set a precedent that such actions are unacceptable and will be punished, making leaders think twice before resorting to terror and violence as a method of social/political control.

For more information: www.juiciogoniya.org.bo

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