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Mexican court OKs arrest warrants in '74 disappearances

WIRE REPORTS

MEXICO CITY - A Mexican court has issued four new arrest warrants against former government officials wanted in the forced disappearance of dissidents in the 1970s, special prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo announced on Sunday.

Six members of the *Brigada Campesina de los Lacandonos* were arrested in the central Mexican state of Hidalgo in 1974 and turned over illegally to the now-dissolved Federal Security Directorate, never to be seen again, according to prosecutors.

Meanwhile, Carrillo said he intends to file long-awaited charges this week against a former president and others for a 1968 massacre of students by government troops.

Carrillo, boosted by last week's Supreme Court ruling that former President Luis Echeverria can be tried in another case, said new charges of genocide and kidnapping against Echeverria and several others were "completely assembled" and would likely be filed by week's end.

Echeverria, 83, was interior minister and head of national security at the time of the 1968 bloodbath, which occurred days before the Olympics opened in Mexico City. Officials said about 30 people were killed by police and soldiers at a rally in the capital, but witnesses put the death toll as high as 300.

The new arrest orders in the Hidalgo case bring to 16 the number of warrants issued as prosecutors pursue crimes of the so-called "dirty war" of the 1960s and 1970s, during which Mexican government agents used drastic means to crack down on small groups of leftist rebels who had carried out kidnappings and bank robberies.

Mexico's National Human Rights Commission has documented the disappearance of at least 275 suspected leftists.

Carrillo emphasized that the new warrants drive home the message that government officials are no longer above the law.

"We are canceling the passports of impunity, gentlemen," Carrillo said at a news conference. "They're not good anymore."

The new warrants target former agents of Mexico's Federal Security Directorate and the Hidalgo state Attorney General's Office, Carrillo said. But he declined to name the suspects, expressing concern that it might interfere with arrest efforts.

The suspects face charges of kidnapping, as federal prosecutors take advantage of a recent ruling that found political kidnappings, known as "disappearances," are ongoing crimes and not subject to the statute of limitations. The Supreme Court ruled that the calculation of the statute of limitations cannot begin until the victim is found or freed.

Miguel Nazar Haro, who directed the Federal Security Directorate from 1978 to 1982, already is under house arrest on kidnapping charges in the disappearance of at least two alleged guerrilla activists.

Mexico's National Human Rights Commission in 2001 highlighted the Hidalgo disappearances as a "paradigmatic"

example of the government-sponsored abuses perpetrated in Mexico's dirty-war era.

Charges in the Hidalgo case were made possible by recently declassified papers uncovered in Mexico's national archive, Carrillo said.

A court in Hidalgo had refused to issue the warrants before a Mexico City court approved the orders on Saturday.

Carrillo was appointed by President Vicente Fox to investigate past crimes, including massacres of student demonstrators in 1968 and 1972.

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