
22 Year Sentence Sought for Colombian Death Squad Head in US

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The ex-paramilitary chief, convicted of crimes against humanity, confessed to having backed former far-right president, Alvaro Uribe.

The U.S. prosecutor in the case against a former Colombian paramilitary, Salvatore Mancuso, is seeking a sentence of 22 years for the former leader of the United Self-defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), Colombian media reported Monday.

Mancuso was convicted by Colombian authorities of crimes against humanity, including torture, forced disappearances, homicide, and gender-based violence. The AUC, which Mancuso helped found, is believed to be responsible for the deaths of approximately 11,000 people as well as the forced displacement of tens of thousands.

Despite the scale of atrocities committed by his group, Mancuso benefited from a special law approved during the presidency of Alvaro Uribe that saw his sentence reduced to merely 8 years.

The former paramilitary chief was extradited to the United States in 2008 however in order to face trial for his activities in connection to drug trafficking to the United States. Mancuso plead not guilty and his trial was held behind closed doors, with many of the legal documents pertaining to his case also having been sealed.

Colombian newspaper El Tiempo obtained the document prepared by the U.S. prosecutor in his case which argues Mancuso should be jailed for 22 years due to his position as the second-in-command of the AUC. The prosecutor added that a 22-year sentence is in keeping with other sentences issued against drug traffickers, such as Diego Murillo Bejarano and Carlos Jimenez Naranjo who received 31 and 33 years in prison respectively. Murillo and Jimenez plead guilty to their charges.

Colombian news outlet Semana spoke with Mancuso's lawyer who said he had been negotiating a reduced

sentence for his client for cooperating with authorities. Colombian right-wing senator Julio Manzur Abdala was arrested in January for his alleged links to paramilitary groups, thanks in part to statements by Mancuso.

Mancuso also confessed to having met with former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and throwing his support behind his election campaign. Colombian Senator Ivan Cepeda has accused Uribe of having received financial support from paramilitary groups for his 2002 presidential campaign.
