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## GRIEVING RELATIVES SEEK CLOSURE AS UNIVERSITY MASSACRE VICTIMS ARE REBURIED IN PERU



Lima, Peru: The remains of nine students and a professor who were murdered in 1992 at the University of La Cantuta were reunited with their families in Lima this week, bringing a symbolic conclusion to one of the most notorious incidents in Peru's long and violent civil conflict.

Family members of the victims gathered at the office of the [Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team \(EPAF\)](#) Thursday to bid farewell to the remains, which were then placed in coffins for burial this weekend.

The relatives hope that the burial will provide some measure of closure, after sixteen years of anguish. They are also seeking justice from the current trial of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori who is charged with responsibility for the Cantuta massacre.

“For me, they are not dead, they are alive,” said Fedor Munoz, brother of murdered Professor Hugo Munoz. “They beat in our hearts. They are always giving us strength to fight on.”

The ten victims were abducted by a government death squad, known as Colina, in a pre-dawn raid July 18, 1992 and shot in the head. Their remains were later found in an unmarked grave.

EPAF, a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), conducted forensic tests and DNA analysis on the remains in 2007 and gave testimony to the First Anticorruption Criminal Court in Peru. The Institute of Legal Medicine in Strasbourg, France also helped with DNA work.

Only four of the ten victims could be positively identified, but the evidence was sufficient for the court to sentence four members of the Colina death squad to jail terms of up to 35 years. The case was the first time forensic evidence had been used successfully in a trial before a Peruvian court.

The Cantuta massacre has also played a key role in the prosecution of Mr. Fujimori, his advisor Vladimiro Montesinos, and two other members of the Colina squad, who are being tried in separate legal proceedings.

“It has been an honor to work on this case with the relatives,” said EPAF Director Jose Pablo Baraybar. “The most important thing that we have done is give them some type of answer as to what happened.”

Ash Kosiewicz, an AP Peace Fellow who is volunteering with EPAF this summer met with relatives on Thursday as the remains of the Cantuta victims were laid out on tables at EPAF. “When I see my brother like this, I always think he is smiling at us,” said Gisela Ortiz, sister of Luis Enrique Ortiz, as she gazed at his skeleton.

The remains were then put into coffins and taken to EPAF’s main hall, where family members held hands in a circle and said a prayer. The coffins will be taken today to the university for a wake, followed by a candlelight vigil at the Plaza Francia in the center of Lima. On Saturday, the remains will be buried at the El Angel Cemetery.

More than 69,000 Peruvians lost their lives during the country’s 20-year struggle between two insurgent groups (the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Army) and the Peruvian government. About 15,000 people disappeared. The majority of the bodies have yet to be recovered and identified.

“We make a promise as relatives of the Cantuta to continue fighting for those who have yet to be identified,” Mr. Munoz said Thursday. “I unite with them as their relatives continue their search, we give our support, and we will continue fighting for full justice.”

- Read the [blog](#) of Peace Fellow Ash Kosiewicz