

Peru's Supreme Court convicts Cabinet ministers

LIMA, Peru – Peru's Supreme Court convicted 10 former Cabinet ministers for their role in the events of April 5, 1992, when then-President Alberto Fujimori closed down Congress and took control of the judiciary.

Juan Briones Davila, who was interior minister at the time, received a 10-year prison term for rebellion Nov. 25. Nine other ministers were convicted of being accomplices. They received four-year suspended sentences that will be reduced to three years as long as they comply with certain restrictions.

The defendants must pay \$1 million in damages to the government, and Briones must also pay damages of about \$16,000 to people who were detained during the events, which became known as Fujimori's "self-coup."

Fujimori's former justice minister did not show up for the sentencing. Two others, the former ministers of foreign relations and defense, are fugitives from justice.

Miguel Jugo, executive director of the Association for Human Rights, known by its Spanish acronym as APRODEH, said the sentences were significant because "usually people who participate in a coup are not punished. The slate is simply wiped clean."

Nevertheless, Jugo said he considered the suspended sentences "too light."

When Fujimori seized sole control of the government, he justified the move by saying it was necessary to stop the political violence by the Shining Path and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. His Cabinet chief, Alfonso de los Heros, disagreed and resigned as soon as the president informed the ministers of his plan.

On Dec. 10, Fujimori is scheduled to go on trial on charges of corruption and human rights violations stemming from the decade he was in office, beginning in 1990. He could receive up to 30 years in prison and fines of about \$30 million.

While the charges Fujimori faces are more serious than those on which his former

Cabinet members were convicted, Jugo said the sentences were “a thermometer that shows how these cases are being handled by the Supreme Court. But in the case of Fujimori, the punishment must be exemplary.”

Fujimori's government collapsed in late 2000, after a series of videotapes were leaked showing his security adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, doling out millions of dollars in bribes to members of Congress, business leaders and media owners. Fujimori took refuge in Japan, where his parents were born, but flew to Chile in November 2005 in an apparent bid to return to Peru, despite an order for his arrest.

He was detained by Chilean authorities, who extradited him to Peru Sept. 22.