

BOLIVIA

Ex-Bolivia leader target of lawsuit

■ **The exiled former president of Bolivia was sued over the suppression of a 2003 protest that left dozens dead.**

CHEVY CHASE, Md. — (AP) — The former president of Bolivia who lives in exile in Maryland is being sued for allegedly overseeing the suppression of protests in 2003 that left roughly 60 people dead and hundreds wounded.

The lawsuit against Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was unsealed in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt, Md., on behalf of 10 Bolivians who had family members killed. They include relatives of an 8-year-old girl and a pregnant woman who were both shot in homes. The lawsuit seeks unspecified punitive and compensatory damages.

A similar suit also was unsealed in Miami against Sánchez de Lozada's former defense minister, José Sánchez Berzain. They fled Bolivia in 2003, with Sánchez de Lozada settling in the Washington suburb of Chevy Chase and Sánchez Berzain in Miami.

The suits claim the men ordered the Bolivian military to violently quell protests

over a new tax and plans to build a pipeline through Chile to export natural gas, one of Bolivia's largest natural resources.

It alleges police and troops using machine guns and sharpshooters fired on demonstrators, most of them members of the Aymara indigenous group, during protests in Andean towns. The killings were "part of a pattern and practice of systematic or widespread attacks and human rights violations" by Sánchez de Lozada, the suit said.

The Center for Constitutional Rights filed the lawsuits along with other human rights lawyers. Jennie Green, a senior attorney for the center, said the victims were innocent bystanders. The suit seeks damages under the Alien Tort Claims Act, which has been used with mixed results in civil human rights cases for alleged abuses that occurred abroad.

A phone message left at Sánchez de Lozada's home Wednesday was not returned. Mauricio Balcazar, who described himself as an advisor, said the former president would not comment. He said the case was politically motivated.

