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MEMORANDUM ON TORTURE AND DISAPPEARANCES IN ARGENTINA

The Government of Argentina acknowledges approximately 3,400 state of siege prisoners detained under executive power (PEN). Arrests and disappearances currently continue although not on the massive scale of the past two years.

In May 1978, the US Embassy reported that "physical torture continues to be used regularly during the interrogation of suspected terrorists and so-called 'criminal subversives' who do not fully cooperate." It reports that if there has been a net reduction in reports of torture, this is not because torture has been fore-sworn but "derives from fewer operations" because the number of terrorists and subversives has diminished.

Torture used to intimidate and extract information is described by the Embassy to include "electric shock, the submarine (prolonged submersion under water), sodium pentothal, severe beatings, including 'El Telefono' in which a simultaneous blow is delivered to both ears with cupped hands." A 1978 Amnesty International report in addition describes "cigarette burns...sexual abuse, rape...removing teeth, fingernails, and eyes...burning with boiling water, oil and acid: and even castration."

The Embassy reports firsthand accounts of physical torture at La Perla Interrogation Center, outside Cordoba, in September 1977. It further reports reliable information about a case in late December 1977, and in the past few weeks credible information about another case. Most incidents reported to the Embassy took place in 1976 and 1977.

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One well-known case of physical abuse was Jacobo Timerman. Another well-publicized case by Amnesty International was that of Elizabeth Kascmann, a 29 year old West German citizen who died three months after her arrest by security forces in May 1977. Amnesty and our Embassy have numerous documented examples.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reports "guard brutality" in the jails, and "beatings and assaults" during "transfers from jail to jail." The Embassy reports that "clandestine seizure, hostile interrogation, and summary adjudication remain basic operating procedures for Argentine security forces." These procedures are

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
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expected to continue at least until after the World Cup Soccer matches in June.

Our Embassy further notes that, while penalties exist for police maltreatment of common criminals, they do not for political detainees. Furthermore, no such charges have been made publicly against members of the Armed Forces which carry out much of the counter-subversive operations, although internal disciplinary proceedings have reportedly taken place for some "unauthorized excesses." Interior Minister Hardindeguy in May called for an end to police use of terrorist tactics, and it was reported that the military received similar orders. However, no progress has been reported in deed.

Disappearances

Reports of torture do not of course deal with the thousands (estimates range in the tens of thousands) of Argentine citizens who were abducted by security forces and summarily executed. These cases, known as the disappeared, include not only suspected terrorists but also encompass a broader range of people-- including labor leaders, workers, clergymen, human rights advocates, scientists, doctors, and political party leaders. A recent dramatic occurrence was the abduction in December of five "mothers of the disappeared" and two French nuns, whose bodies were reportedly discovered washed ashore.

On the spot reports

There is a growing movement led by human rights organizations and the Church to trace the missing people. In La Prensa of May 7, an open letter to President Videla was printed as a full page ad listing the names of 2,592 disappeared and urging an accounting. It was sponsored by three Argentine human rights organizations and paid for by contributions from large numbers of Argentine citizens. Editorials in Argentine newspapers this month further called attention to the "political timebomb" of the tragic disappearances. The Buenos Aires Herald declared "Every effort must be made to trace missing people. It is the only way to convince the world, and to prove to ourselves, that we do care about human rights. If anxious relatives are ignored or treated with callousness, they will become symbols as victims of a totally brutalized society." Innumerable letters are received by the US Government from the relatives and friends of the disappeared calling for an accounting.



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Internationally, human rights organizations are also supporting this campaign. Amnesty International, for example, on May 18 launched a major drive against political imprisonments, torture, disappearances and executions in Argentina.

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Both the internal and external pressure building seek to generate an impact on the GOA to render a public accounting.

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