

9 March 2001

Further information on UA 331/00 (AMR 13/16/00, 27 October 2000) - Fear for safety

**ARGENTINACarlos VARELA]
Diego LAVADO]Human rights lawyers
Alejandro ACOSTA]
Three of their colleagues]**

A group of human rights lawyers in Mendoza province, who represent the families of victims of human rights abuses, have suffered further intimidation. Despite official reassurances, the authorities have not given them adequate protection.

When they arrived for work on 2 March, they found that during the night the nameplate outside their office had been taken, and the light over the doorway had been removed, and the cables pulled out. It appeared that professional tools had been used, and the work would have taken some time, but whoever did it was able to work unhindered.

The lawyers fear that this apparently trivial act of vandalism conveys a clear threat given the pattern of threats and harassment they have faced.

They have presented a formal complaint to the provincial Minister of Justice and Security about this incident. In replies to previous Urgent Actions, the Ministry assured Amnesty International that the lawyers would have all the guarantees their profession merits, and expressed respect for their work. However, this does not appear to have protected them from intimidation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The harassment and intimidation of the lawyers began in June 1997, when they took up the case of José Segundo Zambrano and Pablo Rodríguez, who had apparently "disappeared" after they went to meet a Mendoza police officer. The press received defamatory claims about the lawyers, and local radio and television carried untrue reports that one of them, Diego Lavado, had been arrested. The men's bodies were found in July that year. Judicial proceedings against a police officer and a civilian have been initiated.

They faced renewed harassment when they took up the case of 18-year-old Sebastián Bordón, who went missing in 1997 after he was left in the care of police officers during a school trip. In August 2000, seven police officers and two civilians went on trial for their involvement in the killing. The lawyers, who were representing the Bordón family, received anonymous, threatening phone calls. (For further information, see UA 261/00, AMR 13/14/00, 4 September 2000.) Five of the police officers were sentenced in December 2000 to prison terms ranging from two to 15 years. The sentences have been appealed.

In October the lawyers' offices were broken into: paper and electronic files were stolen, and files relating to the two cases involving Mendoza police were rifled. Anonymous callers later told the lawyers that two ex-police officers linked to the Mendoza Investigations Police (*Dirección de Investigaciones de la Policía*) had been responsible. An investigation into the break-in has been announced, but so far it has produced nothing.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern to the federal and provincial authorities about the lack of security for witnesses in court cases involving human rights violations, and the fact that human rights lawyers, journalists and the relatives of victims face threats and intimidation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that human rights lawyers Carlos VARELA, Diego LAVADO, Alejandro ACOSTA and three of their colleagues are still facing intimidation and harassment, seemingly because of their legitimate legal work;
- urging the authorities to give the lawyers the sort of protection that the lawyers themselves think is necessary;
- asking them to order a full and impartial investigation into the latest incident, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- asking what progress the authorities have made in the investigations they have previously announced into the threats faced by the lawyers.

APPEALS TO:

Provincial Authorities

Minister of Justice

Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad de la Provincia de Mendoza
Dr. Leopoldo Manuel Orquín
Salta 672, Godoy Cruz, 5501 Mendoza, Argentina

Telegram:Ministro Justicia, Provincia Mendoza, Argentina

Salutation:Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Fax:+ 54 261 449 9083

Governor Mendoza Province

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de Mendoza
Sr. Roberto Iglesias
Casa de Gobierno, 5500 Mendoza, Mendoza, Argentina

Telegram:Gobernador Provincia, Mendoza, Argentina

Salutation:Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

Fax:+ 54 261 449 2142 or + 54 261 449 2143

National authorities

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Sr. Ministro de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Dr. Jorge de la Rúa,
Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Sarmiento 329, 5o. Piso, 1041 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Telegram:Ministro Justicia, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Fax: + 54 11 4328 5395

COPIES TO:

Provincial Newspaper

Diario Los Andes
Avenida San Martín 1049, 5500 Mendoza, Argentina

Lawyers' Association

Federación Argentina de Colegios de Abogados
Avenida de Mayo 651, 2º piso, Buenos Aires, Argentina

and to diplomatic representatives of Argentina accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 April 2001.