

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 22/03/93
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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Americas
Date: 2 April 1993

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

María Cristina SAN JUAN ÁVILA
Chile

Keywords

Theme: chronic illness/lack of medical care/torture

Summary

María Cristina San Juan Ávila, aged 39, is currently held in San Miguel men's prison in Santiago where she is serving a life sentence after conviction of "Asociación ilícita terrorista" (terrorist/illicit association) and auxiliary to the kidnapping of Christian Edwards. She suffers from the chronic disorder lupus erythematosus and from Takayazu's disease (constriction of the blood vessels). Since her detention in March 1992, it appears that she has had only one medical consultation, in August 1992. According to her lawyer, she was twice transferred to the hospital at the "Centro de detención preventiva Sur", Southern Santiago's Preventive Detention Centre also known as the "Ex-penitenciaría", following bouts of high temperature, but was soon returned to San Miguel Prison. Amnesty International is concerned that her medical condition is not being adequately monitored and that this might put her health in jeopardy.

Recommended Actions

Letters from medical professionals, preferably written in Spanish, otherwise your own language, should be sent to the addresses below:

- noting that María San Juan Ávila, who is serving a sentence of life imprisonment in San Miguel prison, suffers from lupus erythematosus and Takayazu's disease, potentially lethal chronic illnesses requiring close monitoring and care, and is reported to have had no access to specialist medical consultation or care since her arrest
- asking the reasons for this lack of adequate medical attention and seeking information on her current state of health
- seeking assurances that her condition will be properly managed and that she will be provided with all the medical attention she requires
- calling for full investigations into the reports of her torture in police custody and for those responsible to be brought to justice

Addresses

<p>Sr. Francisco Cumplido Cereceda Ministro de Justicia Ministerio de Justicia Presidente de la Corte Suprema Morandé 107 Santiago, Chile (Minister of Justice)</p>	<p>Excelentísimo Señor Marcos Aburto Ochoa Plaza Montt Varas Santiago, Chile (President of the Supreme Court)</p>
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Sr. Subinspector
César Bustos Torres
Jefe de Unidad
Centro de Detención para Adultos San Miguel
San Francisco 4756
Santiago, Chile
(Director, San Miguel Prison)

Copies to any of the following

Sres.
Comité de Defensa de los
Derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU)
Bandera 465, of. 405 Santiago, Chile
Santiago, Chile
(Committee for the Defence of
the Rights of the People)

Sres.
Colegio Médico de Chile
Esmeralda 678

(Medical Association)

Sr. Director
La Nación
Agustinas 1269
Santiago, Chile
(Daily newspaper)

Sr. Director
La Epoca
Olivares 1229, pisos 1 y 6
Santiago, Chile
(Daily newspaper)

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MEDICAL CONCERN

María Cristina SAN JUAN ÁVILA
Chile

María Cristina San Juan Ávila, aged 39, is currently held in San Miguel men's prison in Santiago where she is serving a life sentence after conviction of "Asociación ilícita terrorista" (terrorist/illicit association) and auxiliary to kidnapping. Her lawyers have appealed against her sentence. She suffers from the potentially lethal chronic disorder lupus erythematosus and Takayazu's disease - constriction of the blood vessels. Since her detention in March 1992, she has only had access to non-specialist medical consultation. Although she was twice transferred to the hospital of another prison following bouts of high temperature, she was returned to San Miguel Prison very soon afterwards. Amnesty International is concerned that her serious medical condition is not being adequately monitored and that this might put her health and life in jeopardy.

Background

María Cristina San Juan Ávila was detained with several others in Santiago during the last week of March 1992 accused of kidnapping Cristián Edwards, son of the owner of the daily newspaper, *El Mercurio*. (Cristián Edwards was abducted on 9 September 1991 and released on 1 February 1992.) She was taken from her home by members of *Investigaciones* (criminal investigations police) on 31 March 1992 along with her husband Rafael Escorza and her 16-year-old son, Jorge Antonio. According to her testimony, María Cristina San Juan was blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to an unknown destination where she was made to sit in a chair for two days and was deprived of food and sleep.

During the first night, she was beaten and told that her son Jorge Antonio would suffer if she did not answer their questions. It is alleged she was given a cup of tea containing a drug that made her drowsy and filmed while a man made her repeat after him a description of the kidnapping of Cristián Edwards - who had allegedly been held in her home. During this session, she claims to have had a lit cigarette stubbed out on her hand. She was made to sign several sheets of paper which she could not read. According to María Cristina San Juan's testimony, her son Jorge Antonio was also beaten and threatened with death during his detention. On 2 April, the three were remanded in incommunicado detention for five days, following which Jorge Antonio was released without charge.

María San Juan and her husband were tried under the Anti-terrorist Law (*Ley Antiterrorista*) and sentenced to life imprisonment. María San Juan's husband, Rafael Escorza, was originally given a death sentence but this was commuted to life imprisonment on appeal.

Amnesty International is concerned that failure to adequately monitor her health could put her at risk of developing complications which include necrosis of peripheral tissue due to circulatory insufficiency with attendant risk of gangrene.

María Cristina San Juan Ávila was one of nearly fifty individuals alleging torture or ill-treatment in Chile since the latter half of 1991. Although Amnesty International is not in a position to verify all the details, these cases were consistent with other cases of torture reported in Chile in recent years. Several of the complaints received by Amnesty International were accompanied by medical reports documenting injuries consistent with the victims' allegations of torture. *Carabineros*, the uniformed police, is the force most frequently cited in these allegations, although cases of torture by members of the *Policía de Investigaciones de Chile*, the criminal investigations police, have also been reported. The organization has called for full investigations into the reports of torture against María Cristina San Juan and other detainees. For further details, please see *Chile: Torture and ill-treatment continue*. (AMR 22/01/93, March 1993).