

amnesty international news release

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AMNESTY SAYS POLITICAL PRISONERS TORTURED IN URUGUAY

Amnesty International said today (Monday) that torture has become "a common method of interrogation" of political prisoners in Uruguay.

Amnesty said the latest upsurge in torture allegations coincided with reports of a new wave of arrests in Uruguay. The arrests reportedly were linked with Juan Maria Bordaberry's visit last month to Buenos Aires where he attended the inauguration ceremonies of the new Argentine President, Hector Campara.

Amnesty asked the Uruguayan government for an immediate investigation into a number of recent cases of maltreatment of prisoners, including one in which a detainee died after torture, and another involving a 13-year-old boy who allegedly was held and interrogated by security forces for three days.

In a letter to President Bordaberry, Amnesty Secretary General Martin Ennals expressed grave concern at the death last month of a rural worker named Oscar Fernandez Mendieta, 26, shortly after his arrest by security forces. Although the official cause of death was given as a heart attack, a subsequent medical examination showed severe bruising on the body.

Mr Ennals said Amnesty International was aware of the country's internal difficulties. "Nevertheless," he continued, "abuses of such seriousness as torture, as a common method of interrogation, have been committed and are still being committed in Uruguay." He said these abuses had been denounced repeatedly in the Uruguayan Senate and Chamber of Deputies and by prominent organisations and respected citizens.

An Amnesty spokesman said that in addition to the death of Mr Mendieta, the organisation was seeking an official investigation in the following cases, details of which have appeared in the Uruguayan press:

--Fernando Alvaro Hejias, 13 who was arrested at 4.30 am on May 24, taken to military headquarters with his grandparents and interrogated for three days about a visit to his mother in Chile where

she had fled. Reports said the boy was blindfolded through parts of the interrogation.

--Ruben Sassano, who was repeatedly tortured over a period of 10 months, freed by a judge, but detained and tortured again. He attempted to commit suicide after threats that his 11-year-old child, who was under medical care, would be brought to the prison "to continue his treatment".

--Professor Augusto Bessouat and Mr J Joura, chief librarian of the Fondo de Cultura Universitaria of the University of the Republic, both of whom were arrested without charge recently and whose whereabouts are now unknown.

Noting that Amnesty International was conducting a worldwide Campaign for the Abolition of Torture, Mr Ennals asked that there be "a thorough investigation into the cases mentioned and into all previous accusations by national and international organisations, and that all those who exceeded their authority in the treatment of prisoners will be punished."

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