

URGENT ACTION

PRISONERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER PERSECUTED

Sixty-one prisoners have been threatened and punished for exposing human rights violations in No 1 Wing of Prison Unit 37 in Barker, Province of Buenos Aires. Karina Valenti, the human rights defender who reported these grave abuses, has been banned from entering all penal institutions in the province.

On 28 December 2015, **61 male prisoners** in No 1 Wing of Prison Unit 37 in Barker, Province of Buenos Aires, made a complaint about overcrowding, corruption, torture and ill-treatment.

Karina Valenti, a human rights defender who teaches educational courses in prisons, lodged a complaint on behalf of the prisoners by filing a judicial action (Joint Corrective Habeas Corpus) on the same day. In response, the Head of the Prison Service for the Province of Buenos Aires banned Karina Valenti from entering any prison facility anywhere in the province, leaving those deprived of their liberty without any protection whatsoever.

Karina Valenti informed Amnesty International that detainees were at risk of reprisals and of being transferred, indiscriminately, without consultation and arbitrarily to other units. This is a strategy that is often employed in order to punish anyone who dares to complain. Since then, at least 20 transfers have taken place and at least another four have been halted. According to information received by the defender, prison personnel are holding some prisoners in punishment cells (known as “*buzones*”, letterboxes) in inhuman conditions: without light, medical assistance or water.

According to the judicial complaint, which gives the context for inmates' testimonies, prisoners are living in overcrowded conditions with inadequate food. There is also a lack of medical care – there are patients with tuberculosis who are not receiving treatment – and there are only two showers, three toilets and four water taps for some 70 people. Remand and convicted prisoners are not held separately and visitors are frequently mistreated. In addition, the complaint notes that there is a complex web of corruption and even a scrap yard inside the facility.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language, urging the authorities to:

- Guarantee the physical integrity of the detainees listed in the complaint and to stop all compulsory transfers without prior consultation;
- Grant Karina Valenti access to this facility and to any other prison in order to guarantee the right of access to justice for people deprived of their liberty;
- Carry out an investigation and ensure that the necessary measures are taken and resources allocated to end the inhuman conditions of overcrowding and the torture and ill-treatment reported in Unit 37 in Barker;
- Send a clear message to Province of Buenos Aires Prison Service authorities and officials that human rights defenders are essential for the protection of human rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 FEBRUARY 2016 TO:

Provincial Governor
 Maria Eugenia Vidal
 Tel/Fax: +54 (221) 4294050 / 4294323
 (ask “tono de fax, por favor”)
 Email: secprivada@sg.gba.gov.ar
Salutation: Dear Governor

Provincial Minister of Justice
 Carlos Alberto Mahiques
 Tel/Fax: +54 (221) 4295539 /
 4295540 (ask “tono de fax, por favor”)
Salutation: Dear Minister

Head of the Buenos Aires Prison Service
 Fernando Díaz
 Email:
ayudantia.privada@spb.gba.gov.ar
 Fax: +54 (221) 4270444
Salutation: Dear Mr Fernando Díaz

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:
 Nombre Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 FaxNúmero de fax EmailDirección de correo-e Salutation SalutationTratamiento

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 28 December 2015, a Joint Corrective Habeas Corpus petition was filed on behalf of 61 detainees held on criminal charges in No 1 Wing of Prison Unit 37 in Barker, part of the Prison Service of the Province of Buenos Aires.

Karina Valenti, a human rights defender, explained that she was able to make direct contact with those held in No 1 Wing in connection with an informal education course she teaches called "Count on Me". This was how, during breaks, she was able to listen to the stories told by the young men themselves; their isolation from the civil population prevented them from reporting the serious situation in the prison.

On 6 January, the same prisoners rioted to demand better conditions. "They're going to kill us all," stated one of the inmates in a video that was broadcast through social networks.

The complaint was supported by the Ombudsman of Cassation for the Province of Buenos Aires. The Ombudsman provided information on allegations of torture and ill-treatment and conditions of detention in the same prison which were contained in the office's Register of Cases of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment. This information was consistent with facts set out in the judicial action.

Names: 61 prisoners (m) and Karina Valenti (f)

Gender: both

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