

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 319/93 Kidnapping/Physical Assault/Death Threats/
Fear for Safety

10 September 1993

ARGENTINA: Hernán LOPEZ ECHAGUE (Journalist)

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the physical safety of the journalist Hernán López Echague, a reporter for the Buenos Aires daily Página 12, who has been a victim of violent physical attacks on two occasions between 25 August and 9 September 1993, by unidentified men.

According to reports, on 8 September 1993, two unidentified men attacked Hernán López Echague as he was leaving a supermarket with his wife. He was hit over the head and forced into a car. Inside the vehicle other men continued hitting him and warned him that, next time, they would kill him. After a short drive Hernán López Echague was dumped on a side street by his assailants.

Previously, on 25 August at 3am Hernán López Echague was attacked by two unidentified men who were waiting at the entrance of his home in Buenos Aires.

They hit him over the head and slashed his face with a flick-knife warning him to stop "publishing those things or the next time it will be worse". The attack against Hernán López Echague followed his journalistic articles linking leading members of the ruling Peronist party with thugs that attacked journalists on 14 August at the Rural Association (Sociedad Rural) farm fair which President Carlos Menem was addressing.

Following this first attack, two men allegedly involved were arrested on 30 August. At an identification parade however, Hernán López Echague failed to recognize his assailants and the two detainees were released for lack of evidence (*falta de méritos*).

Although an investigation was initiated into the first attack against Hernán López Echague and, according to reports, some of the journalists threatened have been offered protection by the authorities, Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the pattern of intimidation of members of the press, allegedly for their investigative journalism or criticism of the government. Amnesty International believes that the authorities have a duty to safeguard freedom of expression by thoroughly investigating all allegations of threats and harassment against journalists, and then bringing to justice the perpetrators and effectively guaranteeing the protection of journalists and their families.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The attacks against Hernán López Echague have taken place in the context of a wave of violence against members of the press in Argentina. Recent reports

indicate that over 100 journalists have received anonymous death threats against themselves or their families and have been victims of harassment by unidentified people. Amongst those attacked or harassed in the last three months are Marcelo Bonelli radio commentator and columnist of the newspaper Clarín, radio and television presenters Magdalena Ruiz Guiñazú and Mónica Cahen D'Anvers who received anonymous death threats against their grandchildren; and Graciela Guadalupe journalist of the daily La Nación who received death threats against her son. All the attacks have been denounced to the authorities. The Argentine Press Workers Federation (FATPREN), Federación Argentina de Trabajadores de Prensa, has reported the attacks to the authorities and held them responsible. They also stated that freedom of expression and the safety of journalists is in great danger in Argentina.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the assaults against Hernán López Echague and urging the authorities to thoroughly investigate the events of 25 August and 8 September 1993 and to bring those responsible to justice;

- expressing concern at reports which indicate that members of the press and in some cases their relatives are being subjected to harassment and death threats because of the exercise of their freedom of expression;

- urging the authorities to take steps to guarantee the physical safety of journalists and their families.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic

Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

de la República Argentina

Dr Carlos Saúl Menem

Casa Rosada

Balcarce 50

Buenos Aires, C.F. Argentina

Telegrams: Presidente Menem, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Faxes: +541 311 0474 (Press office of the Presidency)

Salutation: Excelencia/Excellency

2) Minister of Interior

Sr. Ministro del Interior

Sr. Carlos Ruckauf

Ministerio del Interior

Casa de Gobierno

Balcarce 24

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Telexes: 21194 (Via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Faxes: +541 331 1156

Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

3) Governor of Buenos Aires Province

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de Buenos Aires

Sr. Eduardo Duhalde

Casa de Gobierno

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Telegrams: Gobernador Provincia Buenos Aires, Argentina

Salutation: Señor Gobernador/ Dear Governor

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Página 12 (Newspaper)

Av. Belgrano 671/77

1092 Buenos Aires, Argentina

La Nación (Newspaper)

Bouchard 557

1106 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Federación Argentina de (Press Association)

Trabajadores de Prensa (FATPREN)

Solis 1164

1078 Capital Federal, 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 22 October 1993.