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ARGENTINA: THE LONG ROAD TO TRUTH

Amnesty International is appealing to the Argentinian authorities to investigate thoroughly statements made by Alfredo Astíz which could shed new light on the fate of victims of human rights violations which Astíz was involved in or knew about, the circumstances in which these crimes took place and the identity of all those responsible.

The crimes in question include the abduction and "disappearance" of about 200 children who are still being sought by their relatives and by the Argentinian non-governmental organization "Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo". Cases involving abduction of children and concealment of their identity were excluded from the scope of the 1986 *Punto Final* ("Full Stop") law.

In statements widely publicized in the Argentinian media, Alfredo Astíz, a member of the Argentinian Navy during the period of military rule, admitted to having participated in operations by units of the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA), aimed at abducting, "disappearing" or killing people considered "enemies" of the military government.

The statements by Alfredo Astíz confirm other revelations made by members of the armed forces in recent years concerning the repressive policies of that time. Despite these revelations, no effective action has been taken by the judiciary nor any other Argentinian authority to clarify the truth behind these crimes or provide legal redress to the victims and their relatives.

In contravention of its international human rights commitments, the Argentinian state has yet to implement the decisions and recommendations against impunity made in recent years by international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS). These have pointed out that amnesties and other measures aimed at allowing those responsible for human rights violations to go unpunished are incompatible with a state's international obligations, particularly that of investigating the facts and taking appropriate action against the perpetrators.

Background information

Former frigate captain Alfredo Astíz' statements on 14 January are the latest indication that Argentina is not yet ready to turn the page on the painful chapter of human rights abuses committed during the period of military government from 1976 to 1983. The truth has not been clarified and the State has not complied with its obligation to bring those responsible to justice.

Human rights abuses under military rule resulted in thousands of victims of torture and extrajudicial execution. Around 9,000 people were registered as "disappeared" in the report published in 1984 by the National Commission on Disappearances (CONADEP). The report states that "the ESMA was not only a clandestine detention centre where people were tortured, but also

functioned as the operational axis of a complex organization which possibly even attempted to cover up its crimes by eliminating the victims."

The trials of military *junta* members in 1985 did not fully comply with Argentina's international obligation to investigate human rights violations and guarantee the right to truth and justice for victims and their relatives. The 1986 Punto Final Law and the Due Obedience Law of 1987, along with the presidential pardons of 1989 and 1990, denied the victims' relatives all possibility of obtaining legal reparation in Argentina.

In March 1995, former Navy officer Adolfo Francisco Scilingo stated publicly that the "disappeared" people held in the ESMA had been thrown naked into the ocean from an aeroplane. His declarations failed to prompt the thorough investigations, necessary to discover the truth and to clarify the past.

Amnesty International has supported and recognized the value and importance of the judicial investigations being carried out by the Spanish National Court (*Audiencia Nacional*) into cases of Spanish nationals "disappeared" in Argentina. The organization has called on the Argentinian authorities to cooperate resolutely with the Spanish judiciary's initiative.

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