

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 13/16/00

UA 331/00

Fear for

**ARGENTINACarlos VARELA]
Diego LAVADO]Human rights lawyers
Alejandro ACOSTA]
Three of their colleagues**

A group of lawyers in Mendoza province representing the families of victims in two important human rights cases have been intimidated and harassed, and their offices have been broken into. The police are suspected of complicity, and Amnesty International believes the lawyers are in serious danger.

Since taking up two high-profile cases in which police officers are accused of killing people in their custody, the lawyers named above have faced a mounting campaign of harassment and intimidation. The Mendoza Ministry of Justice and Security has previously assured Amnesty International in a letter that the lawyers will have all the guarantees their profession merits and has expressed respect for their work, but it appears that the intimidation is continuing.

On 24 October their Mendoza offices were broken into, and paper and electronic files were stolen. Files relating to the two cases involving police officers were rifled through. Anonymous callers later telephoned the lawyers and told them that two ex-police officers linked to the Mendoza Investigations Police (*Dirección de Investigaciones de la Policía*) were responsible for the break-in. The police and the Ministry of Justice and Security have been informed of the break-in, but Amnesty International is not aware of any measures taken to protect the lawyers.

In August the lawyers received three anonymous telephone calls as seven police officers and two civilians went on trial charged with involvement in the killing of Sebastián Bordón, an 18-year-old student who went missing in 1997 after he was left in the care of police officers while on a school trip. The lawyers are representing the Bordón family, who have also been threatened since the trial began. The trial is continuing, and more hearings are scheduled shortly. (For further information, see UA 261/00, AMR 13/14/00, 4 September 2000)

In June defamatory claims about the lawyers were distributed to the press, apparently because they had taken up the case of José Segundo Zambrano and Pablo Rodríguez, who "disappeared" in March, reportedly after they went to meet a Mendoza police officer. Two days later local radio and television carried untrue reports that one of the lawyers, Diego Lavado, had been arrested. The bodies of José Segundo Zambrano and Pablo Rodríguez were found in July, and judicial investigations into their killings are now underway. (For further information, see UA 170/00, AMR 13/09/00, 22 June 2000 and follow-ups AMR 13/10/00, 5 July 2000 and AMR 13/15/00, 12 October 2000).

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

- expressing concern that human rights lawyers Carlos Varela, Diego Lavado, Alejandro Acosta and three of their colleagues are being intimidated and harassed, and that their offices have been broken into, seemingly because of their legitimate legal work;
- urging the authorities to take all measures the lawyers themselves deem necessary to guarantee their safety;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the break-in with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that in a letter earlier this year, the Mendoza Ministry of Justice and Security assured Amnesty International that the lawyers' safety would be guaranteed.

APPEALS TO:

Provincial Authorities

Minister of Justice

Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad de la Provincia de Mendoza

Dr. Leopoldo Manuel Orquín

Salta 672, Godoy Cruz, 5501 Mendoza, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Fax: + 54 261 449 9083

Governor Mendoza Province

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de Mendoza

Sr. Roberto Iglesias

Casa de Gobierno, 5500 Mendoza, Mendoza, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

Fax: + 54 261 449 2142 or + 54 261 449 2143

National authorities

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Sr. Ministro de Justicia y Derechos Humanos

Dr. Jorge de la Rúa,

Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos

Sarmiento 329, 5o. Piso, 1041 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Fax: + 54 11 4328 5395

COPIES TO:

Provincial Newspaper

Diario Los Andes

Avenida San Martín 1049, 5500 Mendoza, Argentina

Lawyers Association

Federación Argentina de Colegios de Abogados

Avenida de Mayo 651, 2º piso, Buenos Aires, 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 8 December 2000.