## DEATHS UNDER TORTURE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN PARAGUAY

### How did they die?

Mario ARZAMENDIA FLORES Evasio BENITEZ ARMOA Arturo BERNAL Juan Manuel CABRAL Juan Carlos DA COSTA Juan José FARIAS Joel FILARTIGA SPERATTI Silvano FLORES Sixto MELGAREJO Cándido OVIEDO Juan de Dios SALINAS Mario Raúl SCHAERER PRONO Albino VERA

Why have there been no official inquiries into these deaths?

Where are: Bienvenido ARGUELLO Nilo BENITEZ Aurelio GAONA

Amnesty

International

Agustín GOIBURU Darío Gilberto GOÑI MARTINEZ Lorenzo GONZALEZ Octavio Rubén GONZALEZ ACOSTA **Doroteo GRANDEL** Elixto, Policarpo, Francisco and Adolfo LOPEZ Lorenzo LOPEZ Lucio LOPEZ Carlos José MANCUELLO Máxima MELGAREJO DE BENITEZ and Crescencio BENITEZ GALEANO Amílcar OVIEDO Ramón PINTOS Carlos RAMIREZ BLANCO Benjamín and Carlos Rodolfo RAMIREZ VILLALBA Aníbal RIQUELME **Diego RODAS** Miguel Angel SOLER Américo VILLAGRA **Derlis VILLAGRA** 

What happened to them after their arrests?

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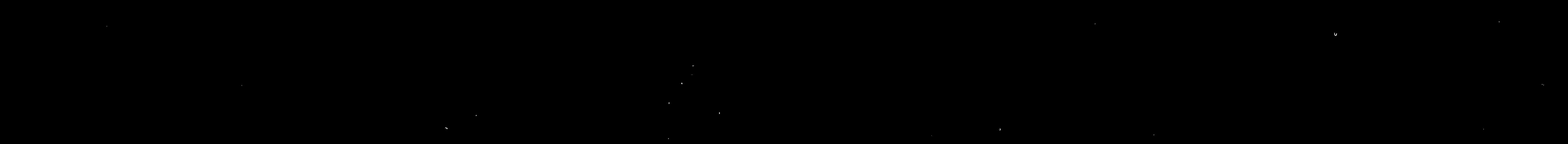
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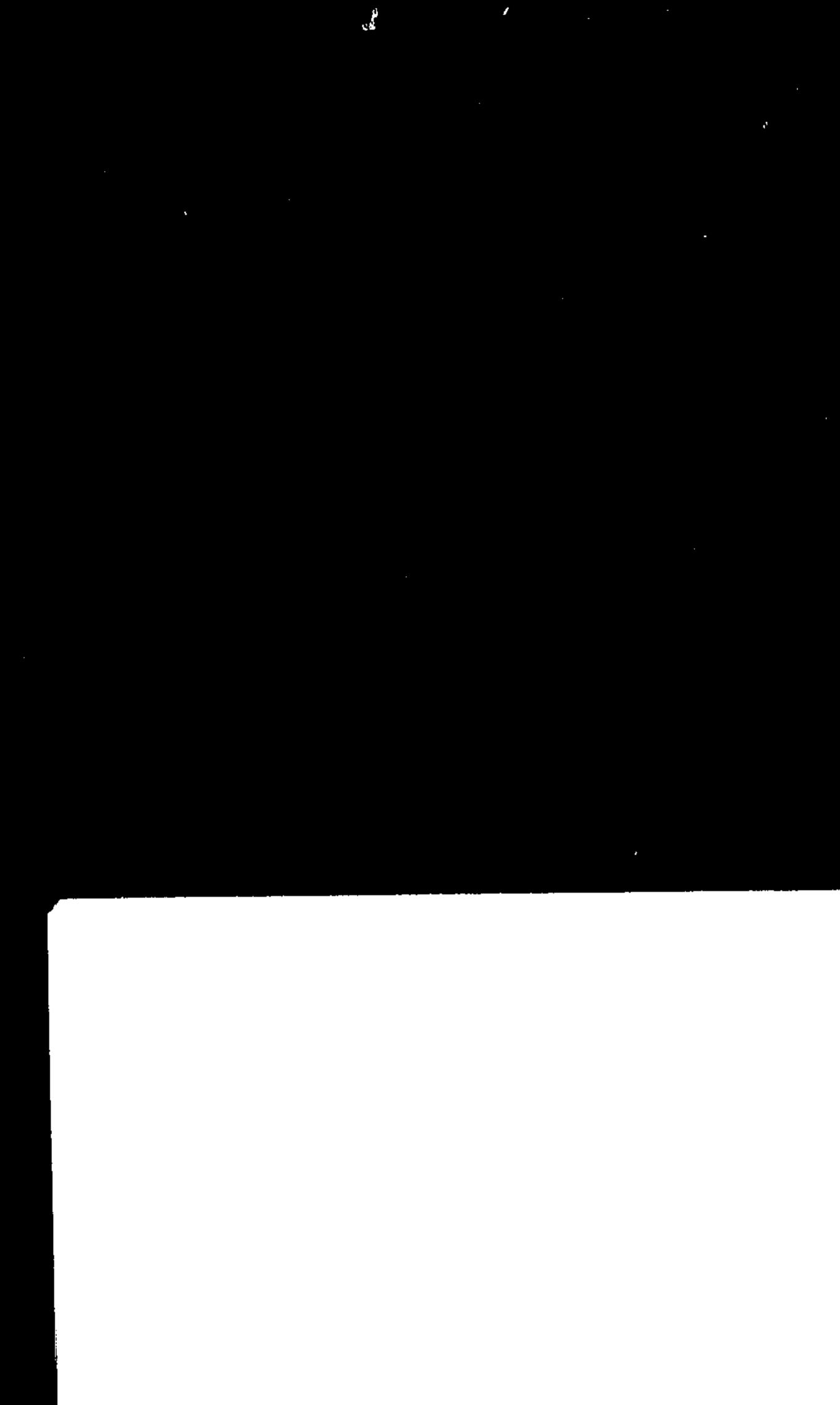
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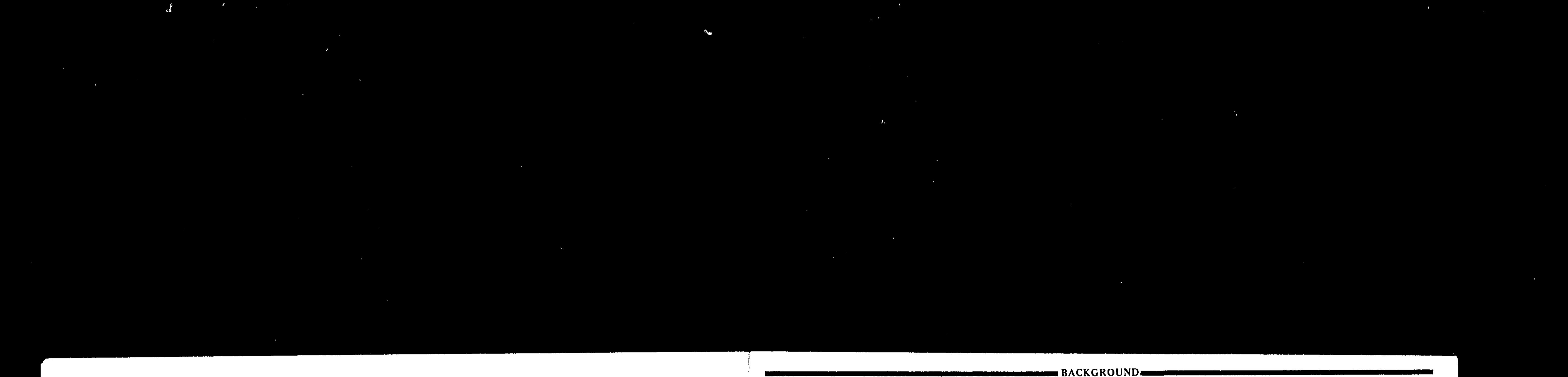
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Although human rights and legal guarantees are fully provided by Paraguayan law, persons suspected of political offences are denied all constitutional safeguards. As a result, deaths under torture and unacknowledged detentions are routine practices. In this leaflet, AI outlines cases of political prisoners reported to have died under torture, and details of persons classified as 'missing' but who are believed to be held in secret in police stations and military detention centers in Paraguay.



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The Republic of Paraguay, situated in the center of South America, is the poorest country in the continent. Approximately 70% of the population is involved in the agricultural sector. Outside Asunción, the capital city, medical attention is virtually non-existent. Only one in six children receives six years of primary education. The population of 2,500,000 is overwhelmingly mestizo (mixed Spanish and Guaraní Indian). Economical and political conditions have led 25-30% of the population to live abroad, mainly in neighbouring Argentina. A large contraband trade in luxury goods and drugs, totalling several million dollars a year, forms an integral part of the economic and political system in Paraguay.

Despite having a formal parliamentary framework, Paraguay has been autocratically ruled by General Alfredo Stroessner since a coup d'etat brought him to power in 1954.

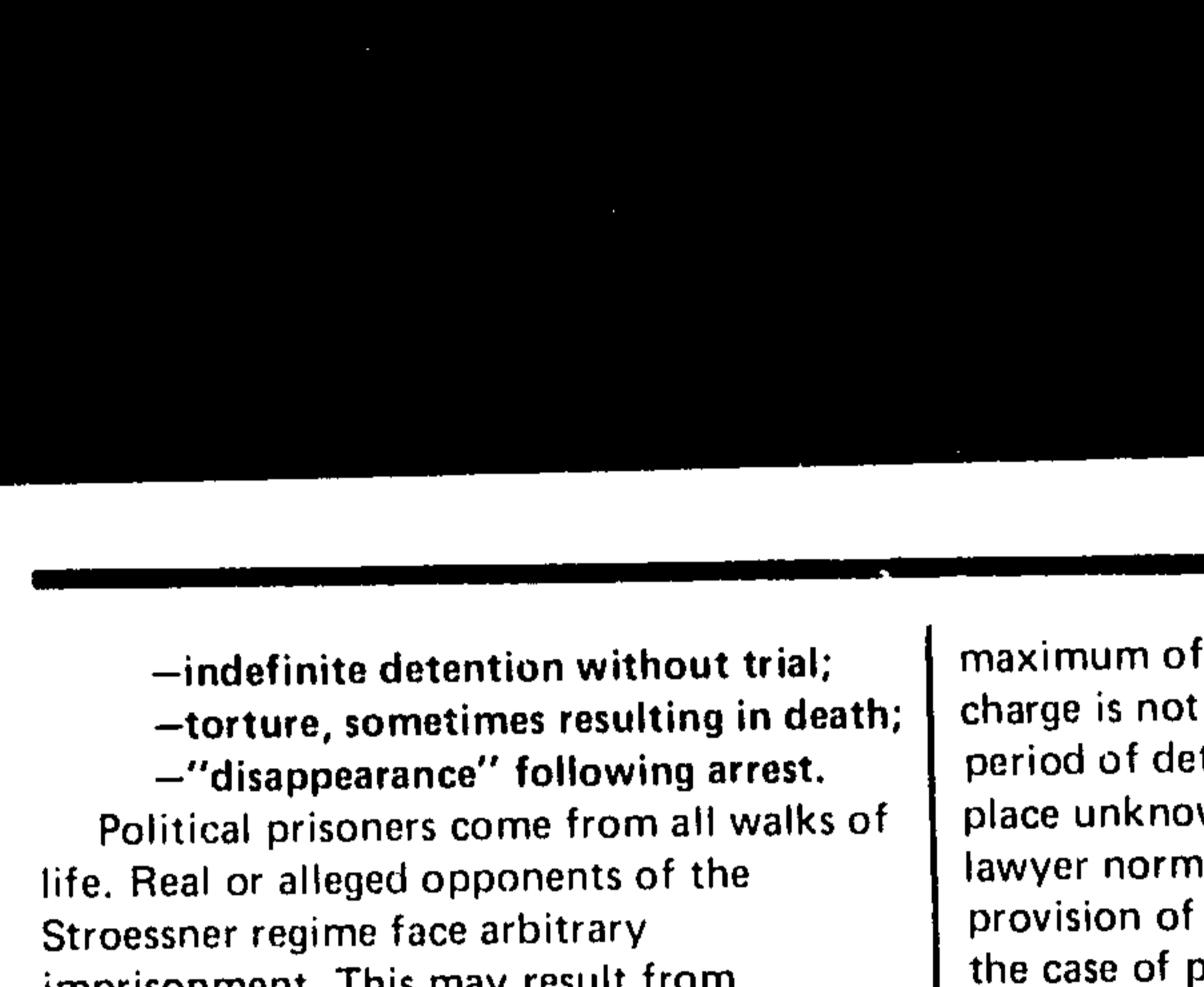


By agreement, the ruling Colorado Party holds two-thirds and the tolerated opposition parties hold one-third of the parliamentary seats. For more than 20 years the President, as a matter of routine, has declared a "state of emergency" every three months which is only lifted on the day of elections.

In 1977, the constitution was changed to permit presidential re-election, allowing General Stroessner to be president for life.

The 1967 Paraguayan constitution provides for basic human rights and legal guarantees, but this is invalidated by the continuing states of emergency which place political offences outside the safeguards of the constitution.

The main human rights violations committed under General Stroessner's rule are:



imprisonment. This may result from individual activity or simply association with a group that is seen to threaten the status quo, such as the Church-sponsored Agrarian Leagues of peasant farmers. To be denounced by an informer is frequently sufficient reason for arrest. Loss of liberty and torture are systematically used to discourage dissent.

Following widespread international criticism of detention without trial, fifty political prisoners arrested in 1976 have been charged and committed for trial. Three detainees held for more than 18 years without due process of law were released in early 1977. Nevertheless, there are still political prisoners who have been similarly detained for between 5-18 years. There is increasing evidence of deaths under torture and "disappearances" after arrest.

Political detainees were held in narrow, overcrowded cells in local police stations mostly in Asunción, until September 1976 when the majority were transferred to the prison camp of Emboscada.

Maltreatment and torture during the initial period of detention incommunicado are common. The constitutional limit of a

Maximum of 48 hours' detention without Charge is not applied to political prisoners. A period of detention incommunicado in a place unknown to the prisoner's family and awyer normally follows arrest. The legal provision of *habeas corpus* is not followed in the case of political prisoners—either the judicial authorities do not pursue writs of • habeas corpus in cases described by the authorities as "political", or the head of the police station or military barracks denies holding the prisoner in custody.

# **BACKGRO'JND**



Torture of political prisoners during the initial period of interrogation, or even before any interrogation takes place, is common in Paraguay. It is used not only as a means of persuading suspects to disclose the names of potential or real opponents of the government, but also as a punishment and deterrent for opposition activities. The most common methods of torture mentioned in testimonies are:

- 1. prolonged beatings on the chest and face until the victim falls to the floor where he or she is then kicked;
- 2. the *pileta* (bath)—this is a bathtub containing water filled with filth and excrement into which the victim is submerged until he or she loses consciousness;
- 3. the application of electric shocks to sensitive parts of the body by means

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of a prod-like instrument called a picana eléctrica;

4. whipping with the teyii ruguai (guarani word for a plaited leather whip often with small stones attached to the ends) or, with the cachiporra .(rubber truncheon).

The more brutal forms of torture take place at the Departamento de Investigaciones (Investigations Department) which is situated in the center of Asunción, opposite the parliament building. It is the headquarters of the political police. Another torture center is the *Departamento de* Vigilancia y Delitos (Department of Vigilance and Crimes), situated nearby. In addition, torture is carried out in local police stations which also serve as detention centers for political prisoners. One such police station is Comisaría Tercera.

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"Some interrogation sessions last for days, with teams of torturers taking turns. It is probable that the torturers take amphetamines because the torture sessions are exhausting even for them. The sessions are generally carried out at dawn, particularly for the most 'serious' cases. They play loud radio music to try and disguise the terrible screams of the victims."

-Excerpt from a testimony about Departamento de Investigaciones, dated May 1976.

"N.N. is a worker. She is young, aged between 25 or 26. They arrested her on 17 August 1976. On 25 August she was seen being removed on a stretcher from Investigaciones, where political prisoners are tortured. Her stomach was swollen as a result of the large quantities of water she had swallowed during the *pileta*. This is the most common method of torture, as is electric shocks to the most sensitive parts of the body. It was also seen that her hands were bloodstained. She was unconscious. . . "

 Excerpt from a testimony about a prisoner who was arrested during a political meeting at a factory.

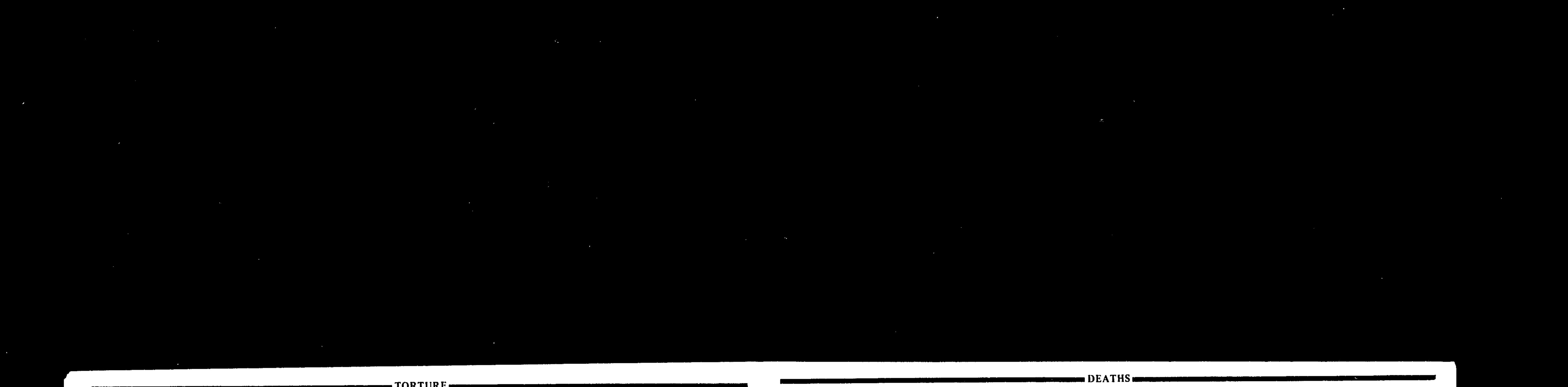
"That night we were awoken by shouting and screaming . . . Some policemen brought in a very dark-skinned, curly-haired, almost negro boy of about 16 years of age.

knowledge..." documents.

# **CORTURE**

He was bleeding from the mouth, nose and face when he was thrown into our room. We thought he was dead as he did not move. He had had his head put into a toilet and had been severely beaten all over his body. Because his clothes were covered with blood, urine, and excrement, they were taken from him. . . a very old prisoner put him on his mattress but nobody knew what to do as we had no medical

-Excerpt from a testimony by a European tourist arrested in Paraguay in December 1976 after complaining of theft of his money by a policeman who had asked to see his identity



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"You can personally testify, Minister, to my concern for this man and for several other peasants from Piribebuy who were seized at the same time. At 5.30 on the evening of 20 May I was in your office at the Ministry of the Interior and I spoke to you personally on behalf of these Christians from my diocese. On 30 June in Caacupé and in the presence of Father Ramón Mayans, I repeated my urgent appeal. On both occasions you took note of the appeal and promised to look personally into the fate of these peasants who had been arrested with Arturo Bernal. . . Is this your reply? The dead body of Arturo Bernal: the mourning of a peasant family, a widow left without protection and five young children left without a father! And there can be no doubt about it--the dreadful responsibility which you bear for the cruel death of one more citizen in the



custody of the Ministry under your control!"

-- Excerpt from an open letter to the Minister of Interior from Bishop Demetrio Aquino of Caacupé, dated 17 July 1976. The case of Arturo Bernal is described below.

An unknown number of victims of political repression have died under torture or by extra-judicial execution in Paraguay. The lack of independence of the judiciary coupled with the fear of reprisals, have left many cases undocumented.

When torture is used for interrogation purposes, it is inevitable that the limit of endurance will at times be passed and the prisoner will die. This is known to have happened in the past in Paraguay and continues to occur.

In the late 1950s mutilated bodies with their hands tied behind their backs were found floating down the River Paraguay. Similar findings were made in the 1960s and

1970s. It is possible to find a few corroborated cases in the past which constitute an important precedent to the more recent cases described here. In the case of Jose Farías, whose body was delivered to his family on 12 March 1969, a legal autopsy revealed bloated lungs, broken ribs and a blood-clotted nose. It corroborated allegations that he had been subjected to beatings with rubber or leather thongs and the "bath torture". The autopsy showed no sign of heart failure, which was the official reason given by the authorities for the cause of death. The only death under torture to have been officially recognized was the case of a 71-year-old ex-army officer and war veteran, Benicio López Quiñónes, who died in December 1974.

There are also frequent reports of deaths during police and military raids which are often carried out with a considerable display of violence. The cases of Silvano Flores and Dionisio Rodas described below are some of the few documented examples of killings during raids in the countryside which were apparently carried out as a means of intimidation.

There appears to be no interest on the part of the Paraguayan authorities in investigating such abuses of authority or, for that matter, in bringing the offenders to trial.

- place.
- 2. Arturo BERNAL

# **DEATHS**

. Mario ARZAMENDIA FLORES Aged 61 years; married with one daughter. Army veteran who fought in the Chaco war. He was employed by a local parish in Asunción to distribute Sendero, the publication of the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference. He was arrested on 5 April 1976 when he visited a house where alleged subversives had been captured earlier that day (see case Nos. 4 and 9) and taken to the Departamento de Investigaciones (Investigations Department—political police headquarters). On 11 April his body was delivered to his family at the police clinic. Despite numerous protests and considerable publicity about the circumstances of his death, no official investigation is known to have taken

Aged about 50 years; married with five children. A peasant farmer and leader of the Agrarian League in Piribebuy (Caacupé) and also a part-time Caritas official. On 12 May 1976 he was arrested and taken to Investigaciones and on 6 July he died, reportedly under torture. His body was taken from the police clinic to his family along with a death certificate giving the cause of death as "pneumonia". Enclosed with this leaflet is a translation of an open letter

sent by Monseñor Demetrio Aquino, Bishop of Caacupé, to the Minister of the Interior on 17 July 1976 stressing the government's responsibility for the death of Arturo Bernal. There was no official response to this letter.

- 3. Juan Manuel CABRAL Aged 44 years; married with eight children. Died in Sanatorio Juan Max Boettner in Asuncion on 20 October 1976. He had reportedly been severely tortured during detention at the police station at Villarrica.
- 4. Juan Carlos DA COSTA Former student leader. The authorities claimed that he and Miguel Sanmartí García, a Spanish Jesuit priest, led the OPM, an allegedly leftwing organization which the government claims to have discovered in early April 1976. An official report states that Juan Carlos Da Costa was killed in an armed confrontation during a police raid on a house in Asunción on 5 April 1976. However, other sources claim that he was only injured and then taken to Investigaciones where he died under torture.
- 5. Joel FILARTIGA SPERATTI Aged 17 years. Died under torture in Asunción on 30 March 1976. He was the son of a well-known medical doctor, philanthropist and artist, Dr Joel Filártiga

Ferreira, who runs a free medical service in the country town of Ybycui. Although police claimed that Joel had been the victim of a crime of passion, there is substantial evidence that he was kidnapped and tortured to death by members of the police. The evidence of death under torture includes medical certificates, photographs of the corpse showing marks of torture, contradictory testimonies by police witnesses and circumstantial evidence such as the disappearance of one of the witnesses to the murder. An autopsy by three doctors



Joel Filártiga Speratti

DEATHS

The corpse of Joel Filártiga Speratti

showed that he had died from multiple cuts and burns of a kind often caused by beatings and electric shock treatment. A court case brought by the family to clarify the circumstances of Joel Filártiga's death has not yet been resolved because of attempts by some authorities to block the investigation.



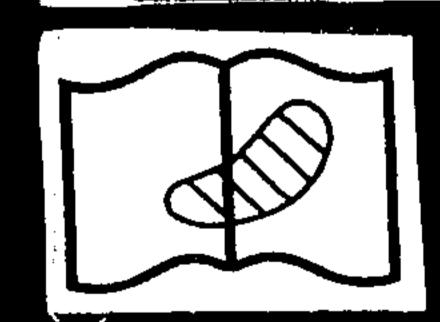
6. Doroteo Silvano FLORES

A peasant farmer with six children, from Santa Rosa (Misiones), member of the Agrarian Leagues. On 14-15 April 1976 his home was raided by security forces. He was injured and attempted to escape but was captured and reportedly had his throat cut. The police claim that he committed suicide. An editorial carried by the Paraguayan weekly paper El



DEATHS 

Drawing by Dr. Joel Filártiga depicting his son's death





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Radical called on the authorities to make public the circumstances of his death and to provide the name of the doctor who signed the death certificate. There has been no official response to this appeal. Silvano Flores' wife Cristina was also temporarily detained in *Investigaciones*.

- 7. Sixto MELGAREJO Aged 25 years; peasant farmer from Quiindy. Arrested with his younger brother Miguel on 1 June 1976. Their father, Victor Melgarejo, was arrested a few days later. Their sister, Máxima Melgarejo, and her husband were also detained and have since disappeared (see list of disappeared). Miguel was released some days later after his arrest but Sixto and his father were transferred to Investigaciones and subjected to severe torture. Subsequently, Sixto's mother received a visit from the police instructing her to collect his body from the police clinic. Víctor Melgarejo continues in detention without trial.
- 8. Juan de Dios SALINAS A peasant farmer and victim of the violent repression in Quiindy in the spring of 1976. He died in custody. His body was reportedly so badly injured that it was not handed over to his family. His wife, Rosa Joaquina, who had given birth 40 days earlier, was arrested at the same time and took the baby with her,

DEATHS

leaving the other six young children in the house. Only after three months did she learn that her other children were still alive. She was also reportedly tortured with blows, pileta and electric shocks by police in the town of Paraguarí. Although she is reported to be illiterate, the police accused her of reading communist books. She was released without charge in early 1977.

9. Mario Raúl SCHAERER PRONO 24-year-old psychologist who was alleged to be a member of the OPM. An official report claims that he was fatally wounded in a gun battle when police raided his home in Asunción on 5 April 1976 and that he died some hours later in Rigoberto Caballero police clinic. However, several other sources report that he was tortured in *Investigaciones* and died on 6 April as a result of this treatment. His 22-year-old wife-seven months pregnant at the time—was also alleged to be a member of the OPM, and was arrested and severely tortured. She later gave birth to a son, and both mother and child were transferred to Emboscada prison camp. She was released six months later. Other members of the family were also arrested and it is reported that Mario Schaerer was tortured in front of his mother.



Mario Raúl Schaerer Prono

10. Albino VERA Another victim of the violent repression which took place in May and June 1976 in Quiindy. He was arrested on 10 June 1976 in Tobatiguá (Quiindy) by members of the police detachment of San Juan (Misiones). After his arrest he was

torture there in mid-June.

These are only the cases that were reported during 1976. Other cases of deaths in detention reported in previous years have never been satisfactorily explained. Examples are the cases of Evasio BENITEZ ARMOA, Juan José FARIAS, and Cándido OVIEDO.

transferred to Paraguari and died under

There also remain cases where secrecy surrounding police and military operations and the intimidation and isolation of relatives make it difficult to establish whether a prisoner is dead or alive. A typical case is that of Martino ROLON CENTURION, a peasant and leader of the Agrarian Leagues. According to an official report, he was killed during a dawn raid on his home in Valle Apuá (Lambaré) on 4 April 1976 in connection with the authorities' alleged discovery of the OPM. However, other reports claimed that he was arrested with his wife and subsequently died under torture. More recent reports now indicate that he is still alive and held in a military unit where he is undergoing severe torture.

# **DEATHS**

DISAPPEARANCES



"The status of 'missing' seems to be a comfortable expedient to avoid application of the legal provisions established in defence of personal freedom, physical integrity, dignity and human life itself."

-Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS), June 1977.

Relatives of political prisoners and the few lawyers who take up their cases have little recourse to the normal procedures of law. Writs of *habeas corpus* on behalf of "missing prisoners go unanswered and inquiries at police stations generally yield no information.

The failure of the authorities to recognize arrests or provide any information sometimes leads to the assumption that a prisoner is dead, although he or she may later be located in detention.

Bienvenido ARGUELLO Aged 35 years. Reportedly abducted with another paraguayan on 12 May 1975 from Clorinda, an Argentinan town near the border with Paraguay. They were taken to a nearby police station—Comisaría Falcón and tortured. In October 1975 they were reported to be in detention in Paraguay. Although his companion is now in Emboscada prison camp, Bienvenido Argüello has not been acknowledged by the Paraguayan authorities to be a detainee.

2. Agustín GOIBURU Aged 45 years; married with three children. Medical doctor and vice-president of the *Movimiento Popular* Colorado – Popular Colorado Movement – MOPOCO. He had been living in exile in neighbouring Argentina since 1959. On

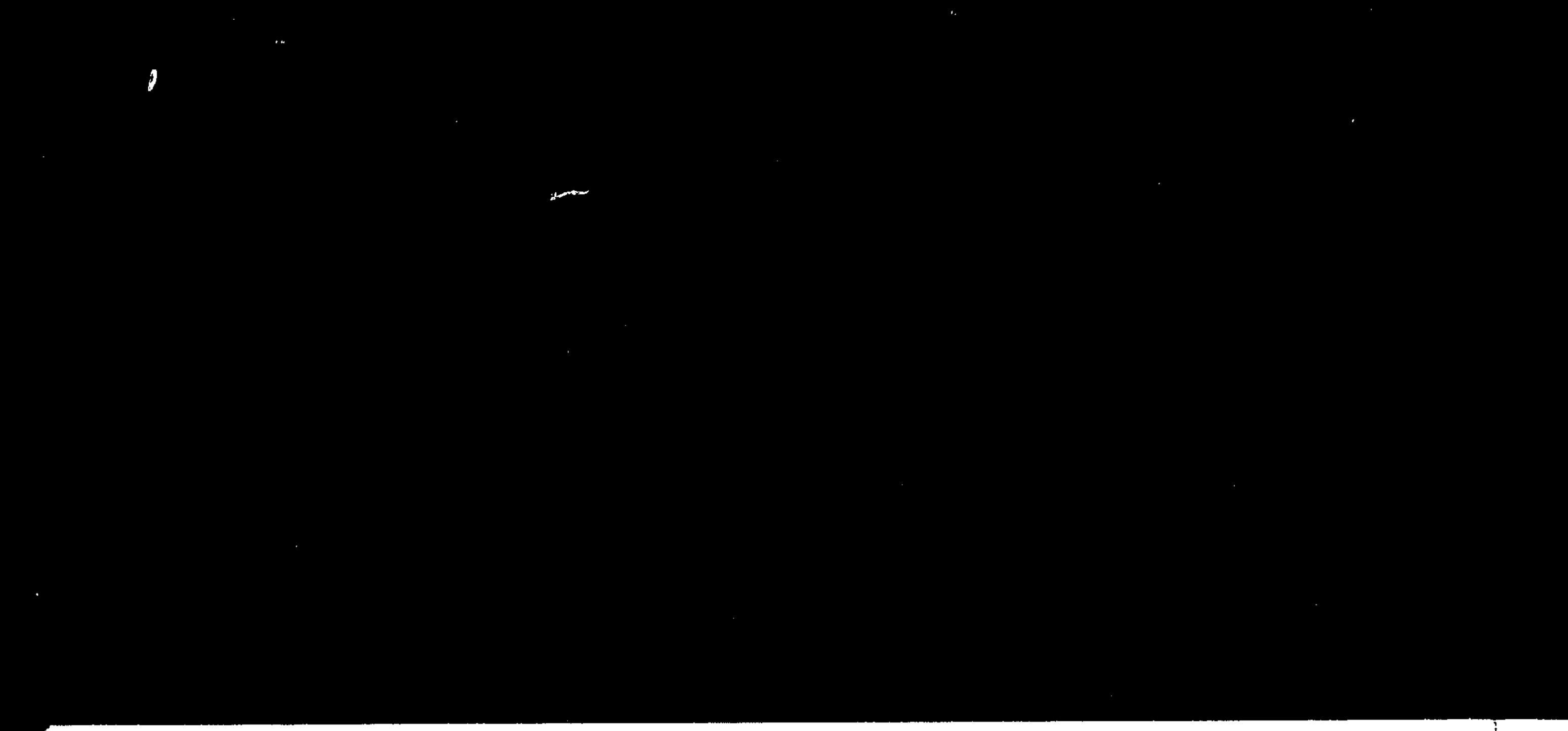
7 February 1977 he was taken to the local police station in the town of Paraná in Argentina but released after a few hours with the explanation that his detention had been a mistake. However, while taking a patient to hospital two days later, Dr Goiburú was abducted and has since disappeared. In a similar incident in 1971 he was abducted from Paraná and returned to Paraguay where he was held in detention and subjected to severe torture. In 1972 he managed to escape and subsequently returned to Argentina. It is believed that he has again been returned to Paraguay.

## Octavio Rubén GONZALEZ ACOSTA

Aged 30 years; married with two children. He was arrested on 3 December 1975 in Acaray (Alto Paraná) in Paraguay. Police officers in Alto Paraná claimed that he had been transferred to Asunción, but in the capital the arrest was denied by the authorities. In October 1976, some sources reported that he had been located in the basement of the armed forces headquarters, but this has not been officially confirmed. His widowed mother, 60-year-old Petrona Acosta de González, has been detained without trial since 29 November 1975.

A peasant farmer arrested on 2 May 1976 in Caaguazú by personnel of the Second Infantry Division of Villarrica. His disappearance was reported in the press and denounced by the Church. After a writ of *habeas corpus* was submitted on 27 May 1976, the Supreme Court requested information about this prisoner from the commander of the armed forces. The answer to the court, dated 18 June 1976 and signed by the commander of the Second Infantry Division, stated that Grandel was "not known". However, a fellow prisoner, now released, has testified to having shared a cell with him in the military unit of the Second Infantry Division. Grandel was reported to have been detained without trial there until at least December 1976. According to the testimony, he had been alone for about eight months in a small cell in which conditions were very harsh. In addition he was suffering from a head injury sustained at the time of his arrest.

5, 6, 7, 8. Elixto, Policarpo, Francisco and Adolfo LOPEZ Four brothers, arrested on 13 May 1976 by members of the police detachment of San Juan (Misiones). Other members of the family were also arrested, including their wives, children and their mother, 73-year-old Ascención Maidana de López.



## DISAPPEARANCES

## 4. Doroteo GRANDEL

Some of these relatives were subsequently released. Others were transferred to Emboscada and still remain there. However, the four brothers disappeared after their arrest.

The eight youngest children of Elixto López were handed over to strangers, reportedly by order of the *Delegado de* Gobierno of Itapuá (local governor), who refused to return them to relatives. The whereabouts of the youngest, one-yearold Miguela López, are not known.

- 9. Carlos José MANCUELLO Aged 24 years, electronic engineering student. On 25 November 1974 he and his pregnant wife Gladys Esther Ríos de Mancuello, a 22-year-old Argentinian were arrested and taken to Investigaciones. In September 1976 she was transferred to Emboscada prison camp after giving birth to a son-their second child. However, Carlos Mancuello was not transferred and since that time the authorities have refused to give any information concerning his whereabouts.
- 10, 11. Máxima MELGAREJO DE **BENITEZ** and **Crescencio BENITEZ** GALEANO Sister and brother-in-law of Sixto Melgarejo (see list of deaths). They were reportedly "dragged from their home like cattle" during the violent repression

DISAPPEARANCES

10 DE DICIEMERE:

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ERECHOS

OBREROS Y CAMPESINOS ACTUALIDAD

PASTORAL, RESOS POLITICOS, DESDE LA EMIGRACIO



On 10 December 1976, "Human Rights Day", the Paraguayan Epsicopal Conference publicized the plight of families of disappeared prisoners in its publication Sendero. They printed a photograph of Carlos José Mancuello's son who was born in prison on 10 August 1975. The caption reads: "His father Carlos José Mancuello, detained on 25 November 1974, was held incommunicado in Investigaciones until 22 September 1976 when he disappeared"

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which took place in the Quiindy area in June 1976, and subsequently disappeared. They had two children: Pablo, aged three, and Isidoro, aged one.

A sister of Crescencio Benítez, Silvia Galeano from Costa Gaona, Paraguarí, was detained in Emboscada prison camp with her two young children and released in February 1977.

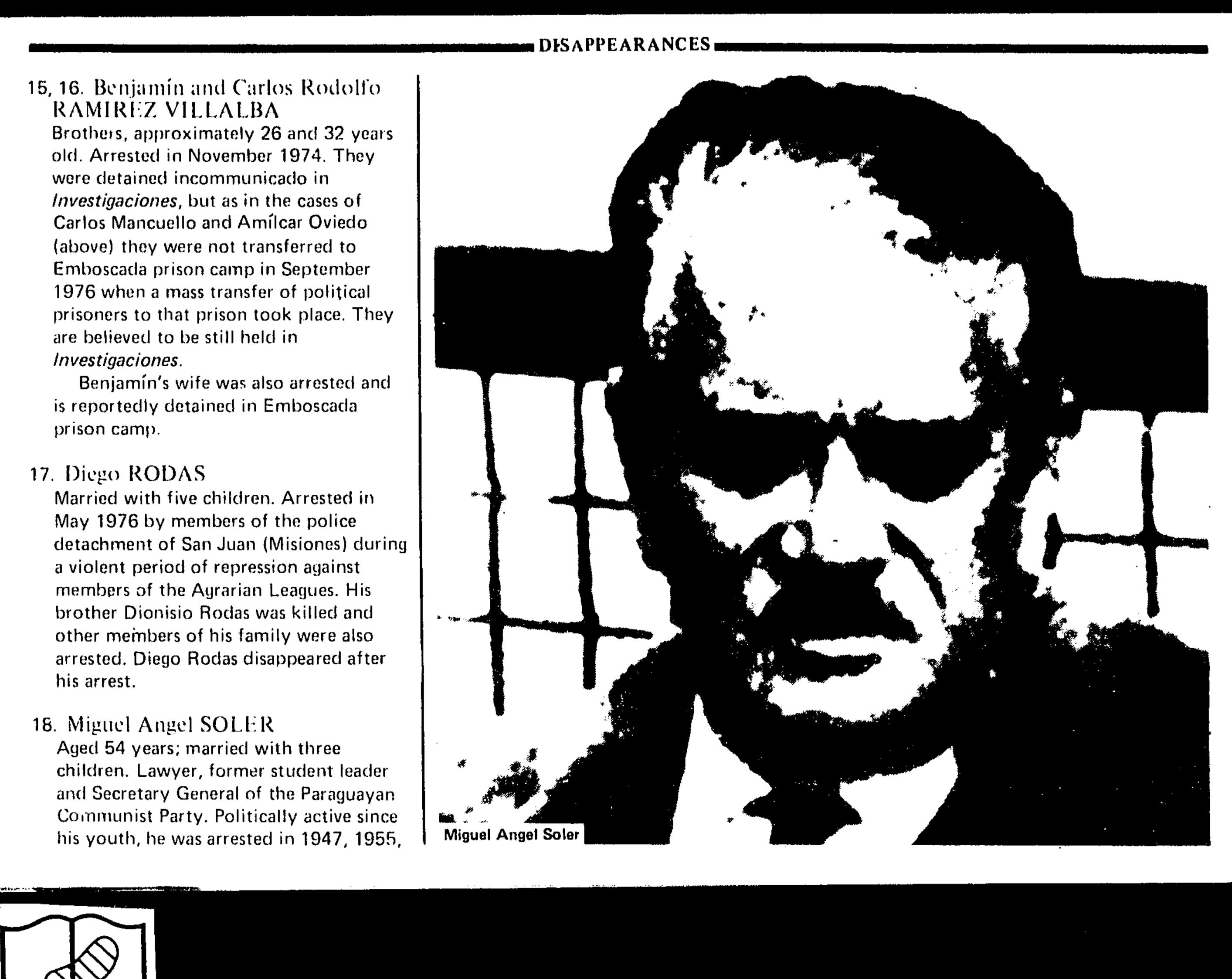
# 12. Amílear OVIEDO

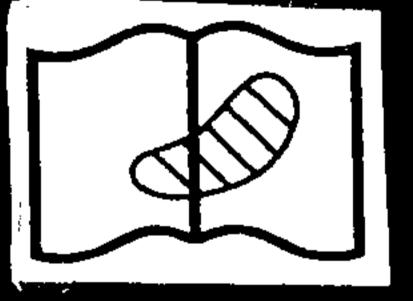
Aged 21 years. Arrested on 25 November 1974 and held incommunicado in Investigaciones. He was not included in the general transfer of prisoners to Emboscada prison camp in September 1976 and was reported to have "disappeared". It is possible that he may still be held in *Investigaciones* but this cannot be confirmed since the authorities refuse to give any information about his whereabouts.

## 13. Ramón PINTOS Aged 21 years. Disappeared after his

arrest in May 1976 and is believed to have died in custody. Two of his brothers are in Emboscada prison camp.

## 14. Carlos RAMIREZ BLANCO Was held incommunicado in Investigaciones for several months in 1976 and then disappeared.







and 1957. During the last of these periods of detention he was severely tortured. Since his latest arrest on 30 November 1975 the authorities have refused to give any information about him. During 1976 there were conflicting reports about whether he was alive or dead, and where he was being held.

- 19. Américo VILLAGRA Reportedly abducted by Paraguayan government agents in November 1975 from the boarding house in which he was living in the Argentinian town of Clorinda near the border with Paraguay. He subsequently disappeared.
- 20. Derlis VILLAGRA

Aged 36 years. Ex-student leader and also reportedly a leader of the Paraguayan Communist Youth. He was arrested on 30 November 1975 as he entered Paraguay from Argentina where he had been living in exile. He had previously spent several years in prison without trial in Paraguay. Shortly after his re-arrest in December 1975, he was seen in Investigaciones but he has since disappeared and it is feared that he may have been killed. His pregnant wife, Celsa Ramírez, was also arrested with him and tortured in Investigaciones. She was transferred to Fernando de la Mora police station and gave birth to a boy in April 1976. Her mother, María Lina Rodas,

DISAPPEARANCES

who has been in detention without trial since 1968, was also in Fernando de la Mora police station and suffering from ill health. The two women and the baby were subsequently transferred to Emboscada prison camp.

Many other cases of disappeared political prisoners reported during the 1960s and early 1970s have remained unclarified despite efforts by their families to find out whether they are dead or alive. Examples are Nilo BENITEZ, Aurelio GAONA, Darío Gilberto GOÑI MARTINEZ, Lorenzo GONZALEZ, Lorenzo LOPEZ, Lucio LOPEZ, and Anibal RIQUELME. The family of Lorenzo López, who disappeared in 1970, is still attempting to discover his fate. In an open letter to the Minister of Interior dated 19 May 1977 his father wrote:

> "I am a humble 84-year-old peasant . . Before I die I should like the consolation of knowing whether my son is alive or whether he was killed so that I can at least say a prayer for him".

Amnesty International International Secretariat 10 Southampton Street London WC2E 7HF, England

Please send courteously worded letters to the President of Paraguay expressing concern at the disappearances and deaths under torture of political prisoners, and requesting that a full public inquiry into these cases be carried out. Appeal to the Paraguayan government to apply to political prisoners the basic human rights and legal safeguards provided in the 1967 Paraguayan constitution.

WRITE TO:

Please send copies of your letters to the Paraguayan Ambassador in your country.

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Exmo. Sr. Presidente de la República del Paraguay Gral. Alfredo Stroessner Palacio de Gobierno Asunción, Paraguay.