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STATEMENT ON TORTURE IN URUGUAY
MADE BY
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TO
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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These photographs were sent out by a Uruguayan military officer. He said he did this because of the "revulsion I feel for all that I have the misery of witnessing, and worse still, in some cases, of taking part in".



The photograph shows a hooded man enduring *la bandera* (the banner); suspended by his wrists in the garden of a house.



The photograph shows another hooded but naked man, his wrists handcuffed behind his back, enduring a painful form of torture called *el caballete* (the sawhorse); forced to straddle an iron bar which cuts cruelly into the groin.

Lieutenant Julio Cesar Cooper, 35, a former officer in the Uruguayan Army, both carried out and witnessed acts of torture in the Montevideo barracks of the Sixth Cavalry Regiment. Although he refused to commit further torture after September 1972, and was arrested and held for a short period in solitary confinement, he remained in the Armed Forces until 1977. He then left Uruguay. He told his story early this year in a taped interview with Amnesty International, from which the excerpts below were taken.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. Lieutenant Cooper, are political prisoners tortured in Uruguay?

LIEUTENANT COOPER. Yes. Torture in the Uruguayan Armed Forces has existed since the direct intervention of the Armed Forces in anti-subversive action, that is from September 1971. From that time up to the present torture has been progressively applied.

AI. How do you know?

LC. I know from having practised torture, from having been present when it took place, from comments made by Army personnel, and from having seen prisoners with obvious signs of having been tortured. When I employed torture methods I was at Number 6 Cavalry Regiment, Montevideo City. The methods employed there, ranging from the mildest to the most traumatic, are prolonged standing (*plantones*), physiological prohibitions (preventing the victim from urinating or defecating), the submarine torture, hanging victims up by their limbs and finally electric shock (*picana eléctrica*)...

AI. How did you officers react to torture and death as a result of torture?

LC. Well, I do not include myself in the answer, because my attitude to torture is something very special, very personal. But in general the officers consistently displayed an attitude of acceptance. As to the display of feelings of unease or pleasure in inflicting torture, there are officers whom I have actually seen who are fairly discreet - they confine themselves to carrying out the torture without displaying any kind of feeling. But I have also witnessed commanders and officers who showed eagerness in applying torture and satisfaction, even in tragic cases such as those resulting in death. I was able to sense the pleasure of certain commanders and officers, and the mocking attitude they adopted towards the dead person or to his or her family.

Although I was not present at any fatal *dénouement* of torture, I can name the following cases, which I know of through comments by my fellow officers: the prisoner Hugo de los Santos Mendoza died at our regimental barracks in Montevideo City, the prisoner Fernández Mendieta died under torture in the barracks of Cavalry Regiment No. 1 at Durazno town, and in December 1976 two prisoners Porta (Dante Porta) and Facio (Raúl Facio) died within a day or two in the city of Bella Unión, Department of Artigas. As to this last matter, I myself was present during a meal at the headquarters of Cavalry Brigade No. 1 (in the city of Ribera) when Colonel Dinarte Pérez, chief of the brigade, remarked on the problem which had been created for him because of

the nervousness and concern of General Rodolfo Zubía, Commander of Army Division No. 3, in which the deaths had taken place. Colonel Pérez said that he had assuaged the General's fears, telling him that all necessary action was provided for in connection with the events, as regards the official version of the deaths and the presentation of medical certificates. In a word, the Colonel said, he told the General to set his mind at rest and leave the matter in his hands...

AI. Are many officers involved in torture?

LC. I would estimate that 90% of the Uruguayan officer corps - I repeat 90%, and I mean all ranks - are involved directly or indirectly in torture. By 'directly' I mean the person who applies the torture. By 'indirectly' I am referring to the man who bears responsibility for giving the orders. In our unit, for example, there was a staff of two senior and 13 other officers. Out of these fifteen, I can state that only two did not take part in torture.

AI. What was and is the object of torture?

LC. To extort confessions.

AI. And if the detainee were completely innocent, had no knowledge and had nothing to confess... what happened?

LC. Well, I believe that there are a large number of people detained in Uruguay who are completely innocent, since torture is applied in a way that leaves practically no margin for the detainee to demonstrate his innocence. From the moment of the detainee's arrival at the detention centre torture is applied - the prisoner can't avoid it and, given the human condition, in many cases the detainee would prefer to invent and attribute to himself responsibilities which are not real, provided he could be free of torture.

AI. In the presence of military judges, before whom the majority of political detainees appear, what possibility is there of rectification or denial of statements made under torture?

LC. I can perhaps answer the question by citing a case. In October 1972 four doctors who had been imprisoned in our barracks were brought before the military judge. Their statements had been extorted by torture. Before the judge they retracted the statements, and the judge ordered their release. The decree was not respected by the military authorities, and the four doctors were once more imprisoned at the Sixth Cavalry Regiment. I was able to observe that, immediately on their arrival at the barracks, they were subjected to a whole series of tortures, which resulted in the case of one doctor (Dr. Isern) in a fractured ankle. Following this it is unlikely that any detainee would actually deny his statements before a military judge. It would be absurd, since the denial would entail immediate torture to rectify the denial.

AI. In the Uruguayan Constitution and in international instruments like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Uruguay in 1969, torture is absolutely prohibited. Therefore in national and international law, there should be legal consequences for any person in a position of authority who is implicated in maltreatment of a detainee. What is your opinion of the implementation of this legislation in Uruguay?

LC. As far as I know no military personnel have been punished for participation in torture. On the contrary, there exists a clear complicity on the part of the military authorities and the military courts. If someone

tries to prevent or protest against the ill-treatment of a detainee, they will try to silence him and punish him. I can give a concrete example of an ex-Captain of the Army, Carlos Arrarte, who is now in detention. Captain Arrarte had heard the shouts and blows being given to a detainee next to his dormitory in the quarters of the No. 7 Infantry Battalion in the city of Salto. He intervened with the torturers, Captain Tarigo and Lieutenant Nario, and even came to blows with the Captain because of his refusal to stop the torture. This led to Captain Arrarte's trial, his expulsion from the Armed Forces and his subsequent detention. Furthermore the record of the proceedings of the Military Tribunal of Honour (published in the Bulletin of the Uruguayan Ministry of Defence) emphasised the meritorious conduct of the two officers who applied the torture - their zeal in the performance of their duty, their exemplary conduct.

AI. Some methods of torture, like beatings, *plantón* and submarine, do not require sophistication or apparatus. There are other methods which require special apparatus, such as the *picana*. How did the *picanas* reach the Armed Forces, from what origin?

LC. Well, in September 1971 the task of repression was entrusted directly to the Uruguayan Armed Forces. I immediately noticed the circulation of the appliance called the *picana eléctrica* (electric shock baton) in the different barracks where I happened to be. It was the novelty of the moment, and a novelty as a torture instrument as well. I observed that, without exception, each of these instruments was of North American origin, and they reached the barracks by way of the Uruguayan Police Force.

AI. Torture up to 1971 was essentially practised by the police?

LC. Yes, I believe so, up to 1971.

AI. Have you any knowledge of any special training, either nationally, within the country, or abroad, for special intelligence work?

LC. I think these courses have existed as a permanent feature at all times, but more markedly in the last few years, whether in the United States, Panama, Brazil or Argentina. I was able to note that lately there have been annual visits to the German Federal Republic by a group of senior and other officers, perhaps about twenty, to attend special intelligence courses.

AI. What was your participation in torture during the two periods into which your military career can be divided, that is, from 1968 to 1972 and from 1972 to 1977?

LC. My direct part in the application of torture started at the end of May 1972 and ended with the first days of September in the same year... The methods which I came to apply were the *plantón*, physiological prohibitions, and beatings.

In my own case (and I would consider it typical of the general attitude of an officer at the time) torture was regarded as a means to an end. The objective was to obtain a confession from the detainee, purely and simply. The authorities constantly enjoined on us the need to obtain confessions in order to save the lives of military personnel who might be in danger of attack by revolutionary groups. There was a concept of urgency in all confessions. However, subsequently the idea began to lose its force and changed into the application of torture for its own sake, as part of a routine, and also as an act of vengeance against the detainee. I think that the degeneration began during 1972, and this was also when I began to feel it.

AI. Why did you cease to participate in torture sessions?

LC. I began taking part in torture with a set concept of the whole complex of problems our country was experiencing. But between May 1972, when I began to apply torture, and the beginning of September, when I decided not to take any further part in it, I underwent a change of mind. Factors in this change were the most striking aspects of the struggle which was going on at the time, the situation prevailing inside the barracks and in civilian circles, and not least the revelations of corruption and malpractice by traditional politicians and economic powers which were brought to light in investigations by the Armed Forces themselves. I realised that 'subversion' could take many forms.

Then a specific incident took place which had a great impact on me. It was, if I remember rightly, the third of October 1972 when the revolutionary leader Gabino Falero Montesdeoca was detained at the Cavalry Regiment No. 6. The unit's second in command, Major Victorino Vázquez, ordered the detainee to be brought in for interrogation. When the Major caught sight of the detainee, who was led in by two soldiers, he seemed to suffer a nervous attack. He ran up to the detainee, shouting loudly at him and at the same time pushing him forward with a hand on his back. The prisoner, whose hands were tied behind his back, was hooded and could not see, but, responding to the action of Major Vázquez, began to hasten his steps and eventually to run. Major Vázquez steered him toward a pillar which was approximately forty centimetres thick. The detainee ran and dashed himself violently against the pillar, receiving cuts and fractures.

As my ideas began to change, I could no longer endure events like this, and eventually I became unable to apply torture. Another decisive encounter happened on the night of 29 November 1972 at the Cavalry Regiment No. 10 in the city of Artigas. I was given the order to take part in a torture session against a detainee with the surname of Sutil. I recognised him immediately in spite of his being hooded - we both came from the same town and had been on friendly terms since childhood. He had a striking physical characteristic, a deformed leg as the result of polio contracted in infancy, but I had also anticipated that it might be he, for I had heard reports that he had been arrested and was in the hands of the regiment. We were supposed to give him the submarine torture, although he showed signs of already having received ill-treatment and simply lay where he had been dumped on the concrete. When the order was given to proceed, I informed my superior officers, Captain Ruben Martínez and Captain Menotti Ortiz, of my decision not to participate any longer in torture. This incident caused my arrest and subsequent trial by a military court.

AI. Yet you continued to serve in the Armed Forces. Why did you not have a firmer attitude towards torture and why did you not protest more actively or try to prevent it?

LC. I was harbouring the illusion that some sector of the Armed Forces would react, putting an end to the situation, that some sector would seek to create a new perspective from which the nation's problem could be seen. I felt that I could only contribute at the right moment if I stayed in the Armed Forces, albeit as a dissident. I felt that in civilian life my contribution would be neutralised.

AI. Do you repent having participated in torture?

LC. Of course I am totally repentant, and furthermore my rejection of torture is only the most traumatic factor in the evolution of my ideas.