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ARGENTINA : ALARM AT RENEWED WAVE OF ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Following a recent new wave of attacks against journalists in Argentina, Amnesty International has appealed to President Carlos Menem to ensure that the investigations initiated are "prompt, thorough and conclusive."

In its letter of 17 February to the Argentinian president, the human rights organization points out that since 1992 it has documented numerous cases of attacks on media workers in the country, apparently motivated by their investigative journalism or their criticism of the authorities. The information received in several cases indicates the possible involvement or acquiescence of members of the police or of the state's security forces.

The organization issued its call in the context of similar cases in the past where investigations have apparently not yielded any results and in view of the alarming new wave of attacks and threats against media workers this year.

Amnesty International also reminds President Menem of the importance of ensuring that the federal authorities take all necessary measures to guarantee a prompt, complete and impartial investigation into the killing of the photographic reporter José Luis Cabezas and the threats against Santo Biasatti, a radio and television journalist.

Recognizing that it is the responsibility of the provincial authorities to "ensure effective measures are taken to protect Santo Biasatti and his family and to carry out the appropriate investigations," Amnesty International requests that the methodology and conclusions of the investigation be made public and that those responsible for the killing of José Luis Cabezas and for the threats against Santo Biasatti be brought to justice.

In its letter to President Menem, the organization recalls the welcome statements he made in 1993 regarding the appointment of a special attorney to investigate these cases and the intention of the authorities to offer protection to some of the journalists threatened. Nevertheless, Amnesty International also points out that the majority of cases, including the killing of journalist Mario Bonino, remain unresolved and that nothing is known about the results of the investigations nor their current status.

Background

The body of Mario Bonino, a journalist of the Buenos Aires Press Workers' Union (UTPBA), was found on 15 November 1993 in the waters of the Riachuelo river, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. His death occurred in the context of an increased campaign of threats and intimidation against journalists. The judicial official in charge of the investigation found that Mario Bonino had died in suspicious circumstances.

The body of José Luis Cabezas, a photographic reporter for the magazine “Noticias”, was found handcuffed, burned and with a gunshot wound, inside a burned out car in Pinamar, Buenos Aires province, on 25 January 1997. Cabezas had previously received death threats.

Radio and television journalist Santo Biasatti and his family received repeated threats over the weekend of 7 February. The anonymous threats indicated that “Biasatti will go the same way as Cabezas” and that members of the police could be involved in a possible abduction of the journalist.

Between 1992 and 1993, Amnesty International documented more than 120 cases of physical attacks, threats and harassment involving journalists. For further information, see *Argentina: Journalism - a risky profession. Physical attacks, death threats and harassment of journalists in Argentina* (AI Index AMR 13/02/94, January 1994).
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