

UA 237/00

Fear for

ARGENTINAVanesa Piedrabuena - President of the Asociación Travestis Unidas de Córdoba (ATUC), United Transvestites Association of Cordoba

When a transvestite activist died in police custody, Vanesa Piedrabuena, as President of the *Asociación Travestis Unidas de Córdoba* (ATUC), United Transvestites Association of Cordoba, signed the official complaint that led to a number of officers being charged. Since then police have harassed and threatened her, and Amnesty International believes she is in grave danger.

Police reportedly carried out three illegal raids on her home, on 13, 18 and 28 July. They refused to give any reason for the raids or produce search warrants. During the last raid officers reportedly told her: "Keep your head down...Mind your own business. No one is going to look out for you when something happens to you" ("*deja de sacar la cara...Ocúpate de lo tuyo. Nadie va a ocuparse de ti cuando te ocurre algo.*") Vanesa Piedrabuena (her adopted name; her legal name is Roque Virgilio Piedrabuena) has reported all this to the authorities, but to Amnesty International's knowledge they have taken no action to investigate these threats and harassment.

Vanesa Piedrabuena's fellow ATUC activist Vanesa Lorena Ledesma died in custody, reportedly after she was tortured, on 16 February 2000. On 3 July the Provincial Attorney General (*Fiscal*) formally charged a number of police officers in connection with her death. The charges included "*vejaciones en acto de servicio*" (ill-treatment in the course of duty) and "*vejaciones a preso en guardia*" (ill-treatment in custody).

The complaint filed by Vanesa Piedrabuena played an important part in the advancement of the judicial investigation. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge none of the officers charged have been arrested or suspended.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International issued a report on the death in custody of Vanesa Lorena Ledesma (legal name: Miguel Angel Ledesma) in April 2000 ("*Argentina: Transvestite Dies in Detention*", AMR 13/04/00). As the report noted, the Argentine authorities still do not adequately investigate reports of torture and extrajudicial execution by the federal and provincial police forces, and those who report such human rights violations may face reprisals that prevent criminal complaints being pursued effectively.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Vanesa Piedrabuena;
- expressing concern that police officers have reportedly harassed and threatened her since she filed a complaint about the death in custody of Vanesa Lorena Ledesma (Miguel Angel Ledesma);
- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure her safety, so that she can continue her legitimate work with the *Asociación Travestis Unidas de Córdoba* without fear of harassment;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and full investigation into allegations that the Córdoba police have harassed and threatened her;
- asking what steps have been taken to bring to justice those accused of torturing and killing Vanesa Lorena Ledesma.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Córdoba Province

Señor Gobernador de la Provincia de Córdoba
Dr. José Manuel de la Sota, Casa de Gobierno
Calle Boulevard Chacabuco 1300,
5000 Córdoba, Córdoba, ARGENTINA

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/ Dear Governor

Faxes: + 54 351 434 30 13

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Sr. Ministro de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Dr. Ricardo Gil Lavedra, Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Sarmiento 329, 5 piso, 1041 Buenos Aires C.F. ARGENTINA

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Faxes: + 54 11 4328 5395

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Ombudsman for Córdoba Province

Defensor del Pueblo de la Provincia de Córdoba
Dr. José María Zamanillo
Tucuman 25, 4o. Piso
5000 Centro Córdoba, Córdoba, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Defensor/ Dear Dr Zamanillo

Faxes: + 54 351 434 20 60 / 434 20 61

Human Rights Organization

Unidhos
Artigas 218
Córdoba - Córdoba 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 21 September 2000.