

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR.13/009/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 304
23 November 2005

Argentina: Unacceptable ill-treatment in Mendoza prisons Memorandum on the prison situation in Mendoza Province

In Mendoza Province, the system is sentencing prisoners to suffer overcrowding, ill-treatment, torture and in some cases even death, Virginia Shoppée, Amnesty International's researcher said today on the publication of a memorandum addressed to the Governor of Mendoza Province, Sr. Julio Cobos.

The memorandum summarises the situation of more than 1,600 inmates imprisoned in Mendoza Prison - originally built to house 600 people.

Four or five people are sharing cells measuring 2.60 x 1.80 metres each, often sleeping on the floor and living in deplorable sanitary conditions.

Prolonged lock-up in cells has been routine and the prisoners suffer ill-treatment at the hands of the prison staff and the imposition of arbitrary punishments.

Conditions in the prison are so serious that 22 inmates have died since February 2004, in circumstances that have still not been fully ascertained.

"People imprisoned in Mendoza are in such a desperate situation that they have gone as far as to sew their mouths up in demand of better living conditions," said Ms Shoppée.

"The problems in the prison system in Mendoza run so deep that they require permanent changes in the Province's prison policy. These changes are essential to avoid unleashing further violent acts such as those noted in recent riots."

Through the 'Act of Asunción, Paraguay' in May 2005, the national and provincial governments have already made a commitment before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to take urgent measures to improve the prison situation in Mendoza.

"Amnesty International hopes that these promises will be fulfilled as soon as possible."

In the memorandum, Amnesty International calls on the Mendoza provincial government to produce a Prison Policy Plan including, among other things:

- o Improvements in prison conditions, such as adequate medical care and sanitary improvements;
- o The establishment of an up-to-date register of inmates;
- o Measures to eradicate cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;

- o Prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigations into the deaths of inmates and complaints of ill-treatment received, ensuring that those who make statements do not become the victims of reprisals;
- o The establishment of urgent measures to speed up court processes;
- o An increase in prison staff and improvements in their working conditions;
- o Support and protection for all those working for the rights of inmates and improvements in prison conditions.

General Information

An Amnesty International delegation visited Mendoza Province in May 2005. The delegates held meetings with inmates and relatives, authorities, civil society and the Church, lawyers and human rights organizations.

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