

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 13/013/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 193
28 October 2002

Argentina: DaimlerChrysler opens human rights inquiry

Amnesty International welcomes the announcement yesterday by the Chairman of US-German car maker DaimlerChrysler to institute a commission of investigation to examine the conduct of Mercedes-Benz and its officials in Argentina between 1975 and 1978. The Commission is expected to investigate the "disappearance" of some 14 trade union members working in the Mercedes-Benz factory -- now owned by DaimlerChrysler -- at González Catán, Buenos Aires Province, in 1976 and 1977.

The Commission should have full independence, operate impartially and report its findings publicly. Relatives of the victims and other interested parties must be able to submit their information to the Commission, Amnesty International stressed. The organization also urges the Argentine authorities to fully cooperate with the Commission.

While the events the Commission is to investigate occurred over two decades ago, the struggle for accountability continues, and the relatives of those who died or "disappeared" are still demanding truth, justice and reparation. Amnesty International supports them in their efforts to see perpetrators of human rights violations brought to justice and calls for the findings of the Commission's inquiry to be made available to Argentine and German judicial authorities in order to determine possible criminal responsibility.

The State and its organs are primarily accountable and responsible for upholding and protecting human rights. However, states do not operate in isolation. They can be -- and often have been -- encouraged, supported, aided, and assisted by other actors including companies, whose actions or inaction can improve or deteriorate the human rights situation in a country.

Mercedes-Benz was, and remains, an important actor in Argentine society. The company has maintained that it had not played any role in the "disappearances" of the workers. Civil society organisations have long argued that the best way to find out what happened is through the institution of an impartial inquiry -- a view shared by Amnesty International.

The Commission should look at the conduct of company officials, the social situation of the workers, personnel policies, and cooperation between workers, union and management. In particular, the commission should look for implicit or explicit guidelines for the company's policy vis-à-vis cooperation with the Argentine military during the military governments.

Amnesty International also calls upon DaimlerChrysler to institute appropriate policies with regard to free assembly and free association and the right to form trade unions. They should also establish guidelines covering the security operations of the company, in line with internationally-agreed conventions of the International Labour Organization and codes of conduct recommended by the United Nations.

Applying such policies universally, wherever the company operates, would be a necessary, though not sufficient, step to prevent incidents such as the "disappearances" of trade unionists in 1976-77 from happening again.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>