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Argentina: Historical ruling is another step towards justice

Convictions against the former Argentine Presidents Jorge Rafael Videla and Reynaldo Bignone for the systematic kidnapping of children in Argentina is a historic step towards justice in the country, said Amnesty International today.

Videla and Bignone were found guilty of the taking, retention and hiding of minors and the suspension of their identity during the military regime that ruled the country between 1976 and 1983. They were sentenced to 50 and 15 years respectively.

“The convictions against Videla and Bignone show that no one is above the law,” said Mariela Belski, Executive Director at Amnesty International Argentina.

“This is a very significant step in the journey undertaken by Argentina in the past few years to try those responsible for the severe human rights violations committed during the last military government.”

The importance of the conviction ruled by Federal Tribunal 6 is that for the first time, it was possible to demonstrate – through the 35 cases of illegal appropriation of children investigated in this case – the existence of a plan designed at the highest level by the military government to kidnap, hide and rename the children of people detained and disappeared during that time. This way, instead of handing them to their relatives, their identity was changed and they were given to other families that would register them as their own.

Six of these cases were included in the trials that took place against the military in 1985, but at that time it wasn't possible to demonstrate the existence of a plan to deal with the children born during the captivity of their mothers or the babies kidnapped during military operations.

Another six former military were sentenced to penalties of between five and 40 years, amongst them a doctor that participated in clandestine births. This ruling marks the end of a court case that started 15 years ago and a public and oral trial that lasted a year. To date, more than 100 illegally appropriated children recovered their identity, 20 of them were able to give testimony in this process. It is estimated that more 500 children were illegally appropriated during the military government.

“We call on the Argentinean government to continue advancing in the investigations in order for those who are still victims of these crimes, to recover their identities,” said Mariela Belski.