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Argentina: Concrete action is required to end torture

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2 April 2004. Neuquén Province. Claudia Zambrano is repeatedly hit by officers from Police Station 43, who had broken into her house to carry out an eviction order, kicking the door down and hitting various people who were present.

8 September 2004. Mendoza Province. After attempting to escape, nine inmates at Mendoza Prison are continuously beaten and deprived of medical attention by prison officers. The prisoners are kept for various days without clothes, naked or in their underpants.

2 October 2004. Caleta Oliva, Santa Cruz Province. More than 30 people are detained at various police stations and army installations. Later, many of them complain of ill-treatment by members of the provincial police and the *Gendarmería*. Members of Argentine non-governmental organizations and lawyers of the victims complained that the police hooded the detainees, beat them with sticks and punched and kicked them; that various detainees suffered fractures as a result of blows to the face and that attempts were made to rape a woman.

"These examples show the Argentine government's inability and lack of political will to close the circle of impunity that exacerbates human rights violations such as torture in every corner of the country", said today Virginia Shoppee, researcher on Argentina for Amnesty International, while presenting the organization's latest report to the United Nations Committee on Torture.

The report summarizes Amnesty International's main reasons for concern at the Argentine State's application of the Convention against Torture.

Main concerns include the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including minors, by members of the security forces; complaints at cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in prisons and detention centres; and the lack of prompt, independent, thorough and conclusive investigations of such complaints.

"Only effective action to investigate and punish those responsible for human rights violations such as torture will avoid the impression that these incidents are tolerated", said Mrs Shoppee.

Steps to put an end to torture include the duty of governments to take responsibility and be accountable for such serious violations of human rights, implementation of effective preventive measures

within the security forces, effective measures to deal with the causes and other factors that contribute to this situation, the immediate and independent investigation of complaints and the bringing to justice of those responsible.

"The legislative prohibition of torture is not enough. It is vital that there is the political will to apply existing positive standards and end this abnormal practice once and for all", concluded Ms Shoppee.

Background

Argentina has been a State party to the Convention against Torture since 1987. The Convention prohibits the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The United Nations Committee against Torture will meet on 16 and 17 November 2004 to examine the fourth periodic report presented by Argentina. The Committee will later present its conclusions and recommendations.

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