

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats and Harassment

10 June 1991

ARGENTINA:

Hebe de BONAFINI
and other members of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo organization

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Hebe de Bonafini, president of the human rights organization Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and about the harassment of other members of the same organization, following repeated death threats and a series of break-ins at their headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Hebe de Bonafini allegedly began to receive telephone death threats in February this year, after she and other members of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo were labelled as "*traitors to the motherland*" ("*traidoras a la patria*") by President Menem. President Menem's accusation followed a strongly worded attack on him for his decision to pardon the former military junta in December 1990. The attack had been made by Hebe de Bonafini in an interview with Spanish Television early this year. President Menem also started legal proceedings against Hebe de Bonafini for "*Contempt of the Presidential Authority*" ("*Desacato a la Investidura Presidencial*").

One of the death threats was reportedly received on 22 May 1991, the same day that another critic of President Menem, the film director Fernando Solanas, was shot at and wounded in both legs (See UA 193/91, AMR 13/03/91, 10 June 1991). The anonymous caller told Hebe de Bonafini that in her case the shots would not be aimed at her legs but at her head.

Between 22 March and 4 June 1991, the headquarters of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, in central Buenos Aires, have been broken into four times by unknown persons. Money, recording equipment, awards, confidential written material, a computer and computer files were among the items reportedly stolen by the assailants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is a women's human rights organization set up to campaign on behalf of their imprisoned or "*disappeared*" children and relatives during the years of the military dictatorship (1976-1984). With Argentina's return to democracy they have continued their campaign for the investigation of past human right violations and against several government policies, particularly the pardons to members of the former military government convicted of human right violations.

Recently there has been a noticeable increase of violent attacks and other forms of harassment against organizations and individuals who have publicly criticized or expressed disagreement with government policies. Explosive devices have reportedly been planted on newspaper premises and journalists have been threatened. On 22 May 1991, the film director Fernando Solanas was shot several times by an unidentified gunman. It is believed that this shooting may be related to an interview published in the Argentine newspaper Página 12 where Fernando Solanas criticized President Menem.

Although there is no direct evidence of the involvement of the security forces in these incidents, the nature of the attacks, the fact that the victims appear to have been selected on account of their criticism of the government and the fact that no one has been brought to justice suggests that these attacks, at minimum, are being tolerated by authorities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the threats on the life of Hebe de Bonafini, and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- requesting an immediate investigation into the threats and urging that steps be taken to ensure her safety;
- urging an inquiry into the break-ins into the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's headquarters and that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente de la República Argentina
 Dr Carlos Saúl Menem
 Casa Rosada
 Balcarce 50
 Buenos Aires C.F., Argentina
Telegrams: Presidente Menem, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Telexes: 21194 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Faxes: +54 1 311 1249
(via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Sr Ministro del Interior
 Dr Julio Mera Figueroa
 Ministerio del Interior
 Casa de Gobierno
 Balcarce 24
 Buenos Aires C.F., Argentina
Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Telexes: 21194 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Faxes: +54 1 311 1249
(via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

COPIES TO:

Madres de Plaza de Mayo
 Hipólito Yrigoyen 1442
 1089 Buenos Aires, Argentina

CELS
(Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales)
 Rodriguez Peña 286, 1er piso
 1020 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Diario Página 12 (newspaper)
 Avda Belgrano 671/77
 1092 Buenos Aires, Argentina

and to diplomatic representatives of Argentina in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 July 1991.