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URUGUAY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF JOURNALISTS FEDERICO AND CARLOS FASANO

Amnesty International today called on President Julio María Sanguinetti of Uruguay to release immediately and unconditionally two journalists -- Federico Fasano Mertens and Carlos Fasano Mertens -- sentenced last month to two years' imprisonment for criticising the President of Paraguay.

"It is outrageous that the two journalists should be imprisoned simply for publishing articles about the alleged corruption of the Paraguayan president," Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International considers Federico and Carlos Fasano, director and editor respectively of the Uruguayan newspaper *La República*, to be prisoners of conscience -- sentenced to imprisonment for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

On 23 May 1996 Federico and Carlos Fasano were sentenced to two years' imprisonment for publishing articles about the alleged corruption of Juan Carlos Wasmosy, the President of Paraguay. The judge in charge of the case decided that both journalists had infringed a Uruguayan law which stipulates that it is a criminal offence to question the "honour of foreign Heads of State and their diplomatic representatives" punishable with two to nine years' imprisonment.

Amnesty International considers that the application of the law in this case contravenes article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, as well as article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights. The two-year sentence imposed on Federico and Carlos Fasano constitutes an arbitrary restriction on freedom of expression which cannot be justified under international law.

Amnesty International is calling on President Sanguinetti to ensure that the relevant authorities review this law to ensure that future Uruguayan legislation does not permit the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience nor the violation of the right to freedom of expression.

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