

6 February 2001

Further information on UA 52/00 (AMR 45/01/00, 28 February 2000) and follow-up (AMR 45/03/00, 19 July 2000) - Fear for Safety

PARAGUAY **Detainees at the "Panchito López" juvenile detention centre**

Nine detainees have been injured in a fire at a juvenile detention centre in the Paraguayan capital, Asunción, less than a year after nine inmates died there in similar circumstances. Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of other detainees at the centre, where the conditions of detention amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Following a fire at the *Correccional de Menores "Panchito López"*, *Panchito López* juvenile detention centre, on 5 February, three detainees are being treated at a prison hospital, and six at a specialist burns hospital.

Over two hundred minors are reportedly still held at the *Panchito López* juvenile detention centre, despite repeated calls from Amnesty International and other international organizations on the Paraguayan government to transfer all inmates to adequate facilities. For several years, the government has maintained that all the inmates were shortly to be transferred to a new purpose-built facility. Some detainees have recently been moved to a new detention centre (*Centro de Educación Integral*) in Itauguá, 25km from Asunción. Even though conditions are reportedly much better here, there have also been reports of ill-treatment at this centre.

It has been reported that the prison authorities are planning to transfer the remaining juvenile detainees to the *Emboscada* adult high security prison outside Asunción. The conditions at this prison are so poor that only one month ago, the Minister of Justice ordered 33 minors to be transferred from *Emboscada* to *Panchito López* after visiting the prison.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern to the Paraguayan authorities about the grossly inadequate conditions at *Panchito López*, where minors, 90% of whom are in pretrial detention and have not been sentenced, are held in severely overcrowded, insanitary cells with few washing facilities, little access to exercise or fresh air, insufficient food and lack of proper medical care. International organizations including the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have expressed similar concerns.

Amnesty International delegates conveyed these concerns personally to the Vice-Minister of Justice, Dr Fernando Canilla Veras, during a visit to Paraguay in October 1999. The Vice-Minister acknowledged that the detention centre's present site was wholly inadequate. He repeated an assurance he has given several times, that measures were being taken to improve conditions and that arrangements were almost complete for the imminent transfer of the inmates to a new, purpose-built, juvenile detention centre in Luque. The IACHR received similar assurances, and were told that *Panchito López* would be relocated to the site in Luque by the end of 1999.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of detainees at the the *Correccional de Menores "Panchito López"*, calling on the authorities to close the centre immediately, and reminding them of their repeated promises to transfer all detainees at the centre to adequate premises;
- expressing concern at reports that the prison authorities are planning to transfer minors from *Panchito López* to the *Emboscada* adult prison;
- welcoming government assurances that torture will not be tolerated in Paraguay, and asking for news of the progress of investigations into reports of ill-treatment and torture of detainees by prison guards at *Panchito López* and other detention centres and prisons.

APPEALS TO:

President

Exmo. Sr. Presidente de la República del Paraguay
Don Luis Angel Gonzalez Macchi
Palacio de López
El Paraguayo Independiente y Ayolas
Asunción, Paraguay

Telegrams: Presidente, Asunción, Paraguay

Faxes: + 595 21 498 809

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of Justice

Dr Silvio Ferreira Fernández
Ministro de Justicia
Gaspar R. de Francia y EE.UU.
Asunción, Paraguay

Telegrams: Ministro Justicia, Asunción, Paraguay

Faxes: + 595 21 208 469

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr Juan Esteban Aguirre
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
O'Leary 222 y Pte. Franco
Asunción, Paraguay

Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Asunción, Paraguay

Faxes: + 595 21 490 676

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Organisation

Defensa de los Niños Internacional-DNI
Casilla de Correo N° 3101
Asunción, Paraguay

and to diplomatic representatives of Paraguay accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 March 2001.