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Buenos Aires
April 24th

Friends:

This morning (Tuesday 24th) FEDEFAM President Marta Vasquez called me with the good news. Yesterday on Monday night after many meetings and debate, the United Nations Human Rights Commission (HRC) finally approved a resolution to begin drafting an international convention against enforced disappearances. An expert will be nominated and a special working group now established to prepare the text on the basis of the document prepared by the Subcommission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in 1998. If all goes to plan then in 2002 the Commission will be able to begin to work on the final text which we hope will be approved as soon as possible but will certainly take one or two more years.

It is very good news indeed and we wish to share it with you. We have all worked for many years now to achieve a decisive international action against enforced disappearances. FEDEFAM put a lot of effort into the Geneva lobby this year, as many of you also did, so it is really encouraging to feel we are moving forward.

We know that the final drafting process will also be very much uphill as there is still strong opposition to some of our proposals for the new convention. However this step forward by the HRC is definitely a blow to impunity and perpetrators of enforced disappearances must now begin to realize that they will have to succumb, sooner or later, to the demands of justice and law.

We all know in this campaign, no matter what movement or organization we may work in, that each is moved by the deepest personal convictions to end disappearances, the majority because of personal experiences of one kind or another. To express thanks or gratitude then will seem then superfluous but it is necessary to give credit where credit is due even at the risk of not mentioning all who have worked so tirelessly in this cause. Federico Andreu, Leandro Despouy, and Marta Vasquez became major players in achieving a successful resolution in Geneva. Federico as representative of the International Commission of Jurists never tired in monitoring the different opinions of the delegates answering all their doubts. Then Ambassador Despouy as Chair of the Commission had

the courage to leave no one in doubt that he wanted a favorable decision for work to begin on the convention this year. And Marta as President of FEDEFAM, and one of the surviving members of the first Mothers of Plaza de Mayo group almost 25 years age, became a very powerful and necessary presence in all of her interventions, and lobbying efforts. The work of Wilder Tayler (Human Rights Watch), Adrian Zoller (International Service for Human Rights), Eric Sottas (World Organization against Torture), Yvonne Terlingen (Amnesty International), Marc Thomson (Association for the Prevention of Torture), among many others was also vitally important down the years. Then there was the lobby by our Asian compañeros/as - AFAD who argued on the international dimension of the phenomenon.

As for the rest of us no matter what place we may find ourselves in this struggle suffering many disillusionments at the lack of progress made in the past, and the loss of friends and companions such as our companions of ASFADDES only a few months ago, we should all feel proud of this news. Much remains to be done but at long last the plight of the disappeared has become more fully present to the international community who have finally decided to do something very specific about the phenomenon. This achievement is fruit of all those years of work and no doubt it is also our tribute to those absent loved ones - "los desaparecidos" whose presence is always perceptible.

Now we will now be facing new challenges in getting the convention approved and operative. We will certainly continue to need each other and many more hands and hearts to be successful. But at least now we can achieve our objectives.

With warmest greetings

Patricio Rice
Adviser FEDEFAM