

Testimony
by
The Washington Information Bureau
of the Argentine Commission for Human Rights
before the
Senate Subcommittee
on
Foreign Assistance
April 25, 1977

Mr. Chairman, we would like to thank you for this opportunity to submit our views on the human rights situation in Argentina and its relationship to the U.S. Security Assistance Program.

We believe that the question of whether there exists in Argentina today a "consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally-recognized human rights" is being answered in the affirmative by the daily reports of governmental violence, persecution and repression against the most diverse sectors of the Argentine population. This pattern is thoroughly documented in the recent Report issued by Amnesty International on its investigative mission to Argentina of November 1976. This mission included Representative Robert Drinan of Massachusetts. In addition to this exhaustive study, we would also commend to the subcommittee an investigative report of three members of the Canadian Parliament made also in November, 1976, as well as the testimony submitted by numerous witnesses to Representative Donald Fraser's Subcommittee on International Organizations during public hearings on September 28-29, 1976.

We would like to emphasize, however, that in recent weeks there has been a marked deterioration of the situation, including a new wave of arrests and kidnappings which are symptomatic of an increase in the scope and irrationality of the military government's repressive policies. Among those most recently arrested are the director and vice-director of the moderate daily newspaper La Opinion, Mr. Jacobo Timmerman and Mr. Enrique Jara (a Uruguayan citizen), as well as the director of the English-language daily newspaper The Buenos

Aires Herald, Mr. Robert Cox (a British citizen). We have attached to this testimony a list of forty well-known public figures, journalists and human rights activists who have been arrested or kidnapped in the last month alone.

Significantly, this latest series of arrests coincided with the formal banning of the Federation of Argentine Businessmen, a broad-based organization which when legal represented more than a million small and medium-sized merchants and manufacturers.

Mr. Chairman, 13 months after its seizure of power, the Argentine military regime finds itself in serious political isolation inside Argentina as well as internationally. This isolation can only be interpreted as the result of the regime's failure to resolve any of the fundamental problems of the country, and its success in antagonizing even those sectors of society which even six months ago were giving the government the benefit of a "wait and see" attitude.

This combination of success and failure is most notable in the economic sphere, where the military government has not been able to create conditions for the economic recovery which the nation so badly needs. The regime has insisted on a recessionary economic program which has resulted in a 56% reduction in the purchasing power of wages. Inflation continues at around 300% a year, and the Gross National Product will shrink for the third consecutive year during 1977. Under these conditions, the small-business sector of the economy has moved into a position of opposition to the government, joining the trade-union movement which since the coup of March 1976 has responded with strikes, slowdowns and sabotage. These factors have contributed significantly to the overall weakness of the government, and have led U.S. Embassy observers to conclude that the situation is serious indeed.

Three military regimes in the past twelve years were unable to govern and were forced out of power precisely because they pursued similar economic and political policies; that is, attempting to prevent or condition the partici-

participation of political parties and trade unions in the affairs of the nation.

The broad range of the social and political forces which displaced each of these former military dictatorships remain active and in open confrontation with the current regime. A broad coalition of these forces, unified precisely because of the presence of the military in government, is already beginning to emerge. This alternative must not be ignored by policy-makers in the United States.

For the past 15 years the United States has explicitly supported the role of the Armed Forces in Argentina as in the rest of Latin America. The United States must have the courage to recognize its past mistakes and firmly open a new dialogue with the civilian democratic forces discussed above. In spite of its apparent strength, fervent anti-communism and identification with the United States, the current military regime in Argentina is actually deeply vulnerable, unstable and weak. Like other military dictatorships on the continent, the Argentine regime has become an embarrassing and undesirable ally of the U.S.

World public opinion has strongly repudiated the policies of the regime. Within the United States, representative trade unions such as the United Auto Workers, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and the United Electrical Workers have condemned the anti-labor practices of the military in Argentina and have called for an end to U.S. military assistance to that government. Similarly, religious organizations such as the National Council of Churches and the U.S. Catholic Conference, as well as human rights organizations and others concerned with U.S. foreign policy have expressed opposition to this type of support.

Despite the well-publicized reduction in the military credits aspect of security assistance, the Administration has requested significant aid for Argentina for Fiscal Year 1978. This request takes the following forms,

• according to the FY78 Congressional Presentation Document:

FMS credits: \$15 million
(additional FMS credits in the pipeline: \$54.4 million)

Estimated FMS Cash Sales: \$15 million

Military Training: \$700,000 for 186 students

Military Advisors in Argentina: 20

Mr. Chairman, the Argentine government has said it will reject the reduced credit program. However, this "rejection" seems more a rhetorical flourish than a hard-and-fast policy. In addition, neither the Administration's reduction nor the Argentine "rejection" touched upon the cash sales program, the training program, or the stationing of advisors. All these forms of aid contribute to the ability of the military to remain in power despite its manifest unpopularity with the people of the country. We urge Congress to terminate the entire program, as it has done with Chile and Uruguay. The money of U.S. taxpayers must not be used to strengthen, both politically and militarily, a regime for which the violations of its citizens' human rights is a deliberate and consistent policy.
