

In Uruguay, torture a way of life, human-rights organization says

Associated Press

LONDON — One in every thousand people in Uruguay is a political prisoner, and torture in that smallest South American country has become an integral part of political life, Amnesty International said in a report yesterday.

The human-rights organization said all safeguards against unlawful detention had been eliminated in Uruguay, a country of 2.7 million under a military-controlled civilian government.

Amnesty International, which is based in London, said that 2,500 to 2,800 "prisoners of conscience" and other political prisoners were being

held in military and civilian prisons and military barracks.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization called on Uruguayan authorities "to dismantle the state's torture apparatus, to return to civilian justice and release all prisoners of conscience."

The report outlined what it called "the erosion of the rule of law in Uruguay during the last six years of de-facto military rule."

In February 1973, it said, the armed forces took control of internal security and the economy and in June 1973 the executive dissolved parliament.

It said that in the last five years 100 Uruguayans had "disappeared" after

arrest and that 500,000 had gone into exile.

It said prisoners included persons charged in trade union activities, 20 military officers and supporters of the Uruguayan Communist Party.

The report quoted Lt. Julio Cesar Cooper, 35, a former officer in the Uruguayan army who is now in exile, as saying that he had carried out and had witnessed acts of torture in the Montevideo barracks of the Sixth Cavalry Regiment. Amnesty, which said that Cooper had eventually refused to commit further acts of torture, quoted him as citing three cases where prisoners had died under torture.