

17 June 1976

STATEMENT TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF  
THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

My name is Wilson Ferreira-Aldunate. I am Uruguayan, 57 years old; I have been Deputy, Minister and Senator since 1954, representing the Partido Nacional (or 'blanco'), a traditional political party born nearly a century and a half ago at the same time as independence was proclaimed. As candidate to the Presidency of the Republic in the last election, held in 1971, the percentage of votes that I obtained exceeded by 18% the percentage of Juan M. Bordaberry - who until a few days ago held the presidency. I am a senator of my country and as such, a member of parliament which was dissolved by force in 1973. As a Uruguayan and as a member of my party I believe that human dignity can be preserved only in an independent country where freedom prevails. And I say this because it is often said that allegations of the violation of human rights and of torture are an integral part of a sort of "marxist conspiracy" aimed at destroying the basis of Western Christian civilization founded on representative democracy and freedom. He who is with you today to denounce these crimes does not belong to any sector of the traditional left, but rather to an established centrist political party founded precisely in support and defence of that civilization and those values.

It has been no easy task for Uruguayans to denounce the crimes that occur every day both in Uruguay and to fellow countrymen abroad, nor have the voices of Uruguayan democrats been widely attended. This is in part because our country is small and unknown to many and because the death of democracy in Uruguay has not been sudden, nor was it marked by any dramatic event. Rather, the loss of democratic rights has developed slowly and progressively. In addition, in a Latin America that is overwhelmingly ruled by military governments, we have the appearance -- the false appearance -- of having a civilian president, who, in the case of the now deposed President Bordaberry, claimed to rule on the basis of an electoral mandate. Lastly, Uruguayan democratic voices are not widely attended because many of those who knew my country in the past hold to their image



of the formerly pluralistic Uruguay, an image that is so strong that it is difficult for them to believe my country's transformation into what it is today.

Geographically, Uruguay is the smallest country of South America with a population of 2,700,000 inhabitants. Under democracy, we had the lowest rates of infant mortality and illiteracy on the continent. Schooling was obligatory both at elementary and secondary levels; and free at all levels, including higher education. We were proud of the normality in which our democratic processes developed, proud of our systems of constitutional guarantees and protection for the individual, proud of our freedom, which as our Constitution expresses, "No one can be obliged to do what the Law does not ordain nor prevented from doing what it does not prohibit."

What happened in Uruguay to destroy all this? Many in the United States believe that a confrontation exists today between the government and guerilla groups, where both unfortunately commit deplorable excesses. It is not difficult, in the light of this argument, for many to assume attitudes of neutrality or even indifference.

But this analysis is not true. The subversive movement which shook Uruguay until 1972 was completely dismantled. In the last four years not a single death, injury or kidnapping has occurred as a result of guerilla activities. The guerillas have not taken part in a single action, nor has the government accused them of carrying out any propaganda activities. The members of the Tupamaro movement are either jailed or dead. The only people who kidnap, torture and kill today in Uruguay are the government.

It is difficult to make an accurate estimate as to how many citizens are at present in jails, accused of offences against the security of the State, or of "attempting to undermine the morale of the Armed Forces", or simply not accused of anything at all. This is due to absence of information on arrests, but their numbers can be safely calculated at between 5,000 and 6,000. If taken in relation to its population, these statistics make Uruguay the country with the largest per capita proportion of prisoners accused of political offences in the world. Comparatively speaking, it is as if half a million citizens in the United States were imprisoned, accused of political offences. Always excluding those accused of common

offences, I would estimate that, since the beginning of the dictatorship, between 50,000 and 60,000 Uruguayans have been imprisoned or interrogated for supposed political offences. Returning to our comparison: had it occurred in the United States, it would correspond to five million men and women.

Of all the prisoners, only a minority have been convicted by the courts. Others have been subjected to judiciary procedures, and a high percentage of them have never been notified of the reasons for their imprisonment.

It is often stated that approximately half of those detained have been subjected to torture. Yet while making this statement, we reserve the expression "torture" to define only the more sadistic and inhuman forms of treatment of prisoners, because all, absolutely all, have suffered prolonged blindfolding, forced standing (often resulting in loss of consciousness), and abuse with no consideration of age or sex. The more brutal forms of torture include the use of the electric prod; tying the prisoner to a horse or a vehicle and dragging him or her across the field; the "submarine" (the prisoner is immersed head down in a tank of water and held down until he is nearly drowned), etc. This and many other forms are described in detail by Amnesty International in the attached document.

The inhuman methods of repression were initially directed against members of subversive movements. And it was as a result of the application of the entire apparatus of repression, including torture, that the government was largely successful. Torture was used to make the subversives confess; torture was used to force the denunciation of other members of subversive movements; torture was used to find out whether they were Tupamaros, and as is natural, they all confessed to be Tupamaros, whether they were so or not. Thousands of citizens were imprisoned; they were abused, humiliated and ill-treated, many times to death; women and children were raped; all guarantees of proceedings were abolished, and in the attempt "to defend our freedoms and life-style" (or so it was said) both were destroyed. The rigorous internal logic of this system of struggle leads necessarily to inexorable consequences. This system is

incompatible with a freely elected parliament, the protector of the respect for public liberties. So the House of Representatives and the Senate were dissolved and replaced by a complacent "Council of State" appointed by the President of the Republic from among a group of individuals who were often either unknown or of dubious reputation.

The system is also incompatible with the existence of democratic political parties. Therefore, some of them were banned and the activities of the others have been prohibited. The logical consequence of this prohibition is that in fact it mainly affects the democratic political parties, for these do not know how to conduct or cannot adapt themselves to clandestine activities, whereas the prohibition only partially affects those who are used to this form of activity.

It is also incompatible with the existence of an informed public opinion: the press is subjected to rigid censorship, restricted by receiving precise indications from the government as to subjects which cannot be dealt with or statements which must be obligatorily published. The censorship is extended to books; thousands of books which do not coincide with the "national doctrine" - which has never been defined or explained - have been burned. Included among those to be incinerated on orders of the Director of Secondary Education were books on mathematics and pure sciences which did not adjust to the "doctrine". Even language is subjected to scrutiny. When a simple carnival took place in which groups sang satirical rondelets reflecting popular musical and literary inventiveness, following an old Uruguayan tradition, the use of such words as "military", "budget", "government" and curiously "aurora" (dawn) were prohibited.

A repressive system such as the one applied in Uruguay cannot allow any form of privacy in communications: more than 5,000 telephones are permanently tapped, and all communications carried through them are recorded as are others selected at random. All internal correspondence is subjected to censorship, and the decree of 6 June 1975 expressly authorizes the opening of all correspondence both to and from foreign countries. One of my sons, detained by the police, was extensively interrogated about correspondence addressed to him by Senator Edward Kennedy, which never reached him.



The possibility of exercising the right of association (derecho de reunion) is nonexistent in a police state. Not only is any kind of political meeting prohibited, but family celebrations, even birthday parties, must be reported and approved beforehand by the police, for "they could hide political purposes". Engineers, lawyers, doctors, etc., cannot freely elect the authorities of their organizations without first submitting the lists of candidates to the police, who proceed to eliminate a large number of candidates with no justification. The control goes as far as to include the appointment of the representatives of housing estates. What occurred to my friends and relatives who, wishing to celebrate my birthday at a mass on 28 January 1974 in the Church of Saint John the Baptist (our local parish), is illustrative of the extent of control. The entire group who went to the mass, including priests, choir boys and the unfortunate passers-by, were taken to jail.

In a similar way, penal law is a luxury that such a regime cannot allow itself. I leave in your hands documentation on this subject and simply anticipate, for example, that the prevailing "legislation" decrees the confiscation and sale of goods and property of the accused before sentence is passed, although it generously admits that if declared innocent, the money obtained from the sale of his belongings can be returned to him. It will probably be quite difficult to convince a United States citizen that in Uruguay today there are citizens for whom the military prosecutor demands 23 months of prison and who are condemned to 24 years of jail. Or that many prisoners despite finishing their term in prison do not regain their freedom, remaining jailed in the same prison at the disposal of the Executive Power. Or, as it has occurred in several specific cases, those indicted have been offered freedom on bail by the military courts, but the bail is fixed at an exorbitant sum; when the family of the prisoners, after tremendous sacrifices, has managed to obtain the money, the military court has taken it without freeing the prisoners.

I mentioned earlier that initially this entire system was devised to persecute the subversive movements. Even so, it lacked both a moral and even a political basis precisely because it consists in destroying that which it purports to defend. For immediately, under the impulse of its own dynamics, terror was aimed at the whole population. When there were



no more "Tupamaros" left to be tortured, it was focussed on very small sectors of the "Maoist" left and from there it was extended to the Communist Party, whose leaders and militants suffered savage persecution; it then turned against any citizen who had ever had any link with workers' syndicates or trade unions and eventually against the entire population, anyone, "just in case".

Members of my party have been persecuted, punished, abused and tortured. Their leaders have been indicted. Legislators elected for the National Party have been savagely beaten up in jail, and some have been subjected to brutal and sophisticated torture without being interrogated at all. That is, the torture was intended simply at punishing or terrifying. And I emphasize this once again: my party does not have and has not had any relation with guerrilla movements or with marxism, a theory which it does not share. But of course, we demand respect for the dignity of all human beings, as the creatures of God, whatever their ideology.

I believe it unnecessary to continue with this painful enumeration, and I leave in the hands of all Representatives the documents and reports, which corroborate my testimony. Yet before I finish I feel I have the duty of referring to the murder a month ago in Buenos Aires, Argentina of two brilliant parliamentarians, genuine trustworthy representatives of my people: Zelmar Michelini and Hector Gutierrez Ruiz. The efforts of many men and women of good will throughout the world were not enough to save the lives of these great citizens, my friends who waited for three days after their kidnapping for the fulfillment of their death sentences dictated by the murderous Uruguayan government and executed in Buenos Aires by murderers associated with the Argentinian government. I request your authorization to include among the documents for the records a copy of a letter I sent to the President of Argentina before taking asylum in the Austrian Embassy in Buenos Aires; it is a brief and objective account of the events which demonstrates in its tragic simplicity where the culprits are and how the murderers did not even attempt to hide their responsibility.

In a way, it is a public recognition of the lack of sensitivity of those who, while claiming human rights as central in their speeches, do



nothing to defend them. I have the supreme hope that the death of my two friends - one my political colleague, the other my admirable adversary - may serve as an appeal to the responsibility of all and particularly to that of your colleagues, members of a parliament emanating from the will of the people.

Until recently, the Uruguayan regime sought to hide the fact that people died as a result of its repressive policies. - death was a by-product of torture, a "technical error" in its application. There were, of course, some who were directly assassinated, but this was not the rule. Today, with the growing feeling of impunity, they have started to kill openly. To the 29 cases of death under torture documented by Amnesty International, we can add today the Uruguayans who are abducted in Buenos Aires, only to appear later dead in their own country. We can add the bodies washed on to our shores by the River Plate, hands tied, burned bodies, hands cut off, referred to by the Uruguayan government bulletins as "bodies of an oriental race", because the sea has turned their skins yellow, their swollen features stretching their eyes. In a tragic, macabre joke the people of my country say that for once the truth has been said, for as you may know, the official name of my country is the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, and we refer to ourselves both as "uruguayos" and as "orientales". We ignore the fate of many others who in the last few weeks have left their homes in Buenos Aires and have never returned. Their bodies have not been found.

The Uruguayan repressive apparatus was built up with the assistance of abundant material and technical aid from the United States. Uruguayan military personnel had and still have prolonged periods of instruction in several places in your country, especially in the Canal Zone in Panama. Now, when all of this has been transformed into an enterprise aimed at destroying a small country, a small country which must exist, because the world would be worse off if it did not exist, those who helped install the infernal machine now have the obligation to contribute to its dismantling.

The gravest consequence of this process is that it is leading to the destruction of the very basis of the nation. Uruguay operates today



as if supporting an occupying army which as commonly occurs in such cases, attempts to undermine the values and spiritual basis of those it conquers. And parallel to this, the increasing vulnerability of the country and the ever-growing external dependence are putting in jeopardy the entire destiny of the nation.

Uruguay has the highest external debt per capita in the world. Since the beginning of our independent history until ten years ago the country contracted obligations with foreign countries aimed both at covering the cost of building its communication, transport, energy and public services systems and at facing periodic crises in our foreign trade. In this way we reached before the dictatorship a debt varying between 720 and 740 millions of dollars. Today the foreign debt represents - if we include both state obligations and those contracted directly by banks and import firms - more than 1.5 billion dollars. The last ten years represent the highest cost in our history, and during those years not a single cent has been invested; to the contrary, the rate of investment has proved negative. Which is to say the future of generations to come and of the country itself is being jeopardized in an attempt to pay the budget deficit, that is, to pay for the police. Uruguay has the highest proportional budget in the world for maintaining its security services: 45% of the authorized budget, and in practice 60% of the total expenditures. The percentage of the Gross National Product that it represents is three times higher than in Chile. The budgetary deficit varies between a third and a fourth of the total figure, and it is covered in the form of external debt. In other words, whatever each dollar may be earmarked for, each unit of foreign currency injected in the Uruguayan budgetary system cannot be used for any purpose other than for the payment of the army and the police. Or, simply, of the police, because, unfortunately the Armed Forces in Uruguay act as a police force.

Uruguay is the scene of the most tragic problem of de-population in modern history: it is reported that out of a population of three million inhabitants, 300,000 have had to seek elsewhere freedom, work and protection. I believe that the figures for emigration are even higher, based particularly on the number of my countrymen currently living in Argentina. A technical mission of the OAS, extrapolating from an earlier census and taking into consideration our low rate of population growth, estimated that the popula-



tion was about 3,500,000. However, this figure exceeds by 80,000 the result of the recent population census. It is probable that the real number of emigrants leaving Uruguay is closer to the 500,000 who represent the most valuable and necessary citizens: those with initiative, the professional people, artisans, skilled workers, artists and, above all, our youth. As a direct consequence, nobody could recognize the Uruguay of yesterday in the Uruguay of today. Since four years ago in my country, month after month, more people die than are born, because the children of our young citizens have started to be born in other countries.

So much in the name of anti-subversion.

We do not come - and I am sure I am speaking on behalf of all my countrymen - to ask for your help or the intervention of the government of the United States to overthrow the dictatorship oppressing our people. In this respect, the United States Executive Branch of government did not even make on humanitarian grounds the kind of diplomatic intervention that might have saved the lives of our outstanding countrymen and parliamentarians recently assassinated in Buenos Aires. What we do request, however, is an end to the present policy of interference in the internal affairs of the country, supporting the dictatorship openly and publicly and sustaining those sectors responsible for the most diabolic forms of repression - represented until a few days ago by President Bordaberry and his close collaborators including, among others, the Sub-Department of the Ministry of the Interior.

The United States Embassy in Montevideo gives direction, counsel and opinion about the course of Uruguayan politics, and goes so far as giving its seal of approval to specific institutional formulas which would bring about the abolition of the right of the Uruguayan people to a self-elected government.

The United States Embassy in Montevideo acts as a public relations agent for the Uruguayan government in that it publicizes throughout the world false information about the situation of the country, where consistent allegations and evident facts are denied, it supports and claims that subversion cannot be curbed without the suppression of liberties and it gives currency to the lie that in Uruguay "only a handful of communists" have been arrested.

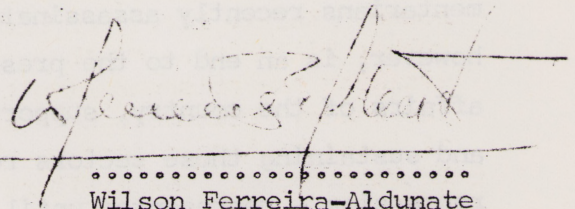


It is this direct and unmasked form of interference in my country's affairs that we strongly protest. In the same way, we object to the financial and technical aid which adds to the daily growth and increased sophistication of the repressive apparatus, and we protest against the direct or indirect forms of economic aid which keep power artificially in the hands of the dictatorship.

All we want is to be left alone. Our countrymen are struggling in all possible ways for the defence of the principles, ideals and way of life that our country took from the Constitution of the United States. Not one of us could ever understand that the immense weight of the same nation that defined those ideals 200 years ago, and today celebrates them with joy, could continue to be given in support for the enemies of our people.

I pray God that this will not happen. I am sure it will not.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.



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Wilson Ferreira-Aldunate  
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