

URUGUAY CAMPAIGN

In addition to the continuation of the existing program and the undertaking of new initiatives, as summarized herein, the CAT Department coordinated AI's research and organizational resources in an effort to highlight and combat the practice of torture in a single country. In conducting the campaign against torture in Uruguay, which took place from February to April 1976, AI made use of extensive, detailed and reliable evidence of torture in order to bring pressure against a government that had proved to be unreceptive towards earlier approaches by AI and other international organizations. An account of the situation regarding political oppression in Uruguay can be found in the country survey of this annual report.

From October 1975 onwards, the International Secretariat produced a series of background and briefing papers, as well as printed pamphlets in English and Spanish. They distributed them to the AI national sections and groups with adopted Uruguayan prisoners, as well as to other bodies. The campaign was launched on 19 February 1976 with a series of news conferences in major European and North American cities. Its central theme was the wide-spread and systematic use of torture in a country which was once known as the "Switzerland of Latin America". The theme was symbolized by a list of 22 persons who, according to information considered reliable by AI, died in Uruguay as a result of torture during the period between May 1972 and November 1975. Even before the campaign started, AI learned of the deaths of several more persons under torture in Uruguay. And as of May 1976, the number of deaths totalled 29.

A petition was circulated worldwide calling for an independent international investigation into allegations of torture. AI had sent the list of 22 victims to President Juan María Bordaberry in December 1975 requesting permission for such an impartial investigation, but no reply was received. Despite conditions of strict censorship in Uruguay, efforts were made to stimulate a dialogue about the human rights situation between AI and a broad spectrum of Uruguayan officials. AI members and groups throughout the world addressed individual military and civilian authorities, informing them of the concern of the international community.

Support for the campaign was also sought nationally and internationally from a wide range of other individuals and organizations, including professional bodies, churches, trade unions, businessmen, teachers, students, parliamentarians and journalists. The International Secretariat made a coordinated effort to inform the European Economic Community (EEC) and its member states in view of the Uruguayan government's aspirations to establish closer relations with the EEC. During a debate in the EEC's European Parliament in May 1976, the EEC Commission expressed its concern about "the indefensible methods of the Uruguayan police against political prisoners in that country" and stated that the European Community had no intention of offering better terms for Uruguayan trade with the EEC.

The response to the campaign was encouraging. Extensive coverage in the news media ranged from Sri Lanka to Venezuela, from Finland to Morocco, and from Greece to Pakistan. The petition was signed by some 350,000 people in 70 countries, including Nobel Peace Prize winners, cardinals, former prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union, high government officials, distinguished scholars, as well as representatives of trade unions and other large organizations. National sections, groups and individual members generated a virtually

unprecedented variety and intensity of actions on many different levels.

The campaign received a new impetus during March when AI received an open letter from a Uruguayan military officer, accompanied by two photographs of actual torture. The officer, who for obvious reasons remained anonymous, denounced the systematic use of torture and other human rights violations in his country and called on the outside world for help.

The Uruguayan government reacted vehemently to AI's campaign. At a news conference in Montevideo on 18 February 1976, Foreign Minister Juan Carlos Blanco denounced the campaign as slanderous and stated that his government did not recognize the legal or moral authority of AI. The government-controlled news media started a campaign of denunciation, accusing AI of being in the service of communism.

Although, at the time of writing, it is still too early to assess the full effects of the campaign, it is clear that the campaign succeeded in drawing international attention to the human rights violations in Uruguay, and that this publicity created a considerable impact on the government.

It also boosted the morale of Uruguayan prisoners, as is indicated by the following letter from an exiled prisoner who was released from a Uruguayan prison shortly after the campaign began:

Information about this sort of action does get into the prisons, and it is of immense value to raise the prisoners' morale. Even isolated acts of solidarity are received with enthusiasm and hope, but when it is a major campaign causing an hysterical reaction from the government, it helps tremendously. Prisoners can endure much better the military's hostility, or even disregard it and feel strengthened in spite of the circumstances.

This was useful.

Following the period of publicity and public action, AI renewed its efforts to encourage the authorities to discuss their policies with impartial outside experts. AI also undertook to ensure that international pressure against Uruguay would continue as long as the violations of human rights persist.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Considerable progress has been made with a research project that was started at the end of 1974 by a group of Danish AI doctors and research scientists with the purpose of gathering expertise in the examination of torture victims. During the pilot stage of the project, the group interviewed 67 torture victims among refugees in Denmark and former prisoners in Greece. By the spring of 1976, they had completed their work on standardizing examination procedures and had collated the data from 67 clinical interviews. The data were used to support recommendations for laboratory tests to identify more precisely the local and general symptoms and the possible long term effects of the severe stress caused by torture.

The most commonly found localized symptoms of torture were the results of *falanga* (beatings with rods on the soles of the feet). This method was the staple of the torturers in Greece: 28 of the 35 Greeks who were interviewed had experienced *falanga*. A report on the preliminary findings, including a comparison of complaints, symptoms and objective signs was begun with a view to presenting it to the Greek government and international health organizations in support of a recommendation that these torture victims be given full rehabilitation.

A further intention of the pilot study was to look for a pattern of symptoms