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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 SY-05 SCCT-01 ORM-02 DHA-02

ARAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 /074 W

082426

Q R 151620Z JUN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6026

INFO USUN NY 631

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part (X) In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

BUENOS AIRES 3960

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUN, SREF, PINS, AR, CI, UR

SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF KIDNAPPING OF REFUGEES IN BUENOS AIRES

REF: A) BUENOS AIRES 3918, B) BUENOS AIRES 3914, C) BUENOS AIRES 3880

1. SUMMARY. TWENTY-FOUR FOREIGN REFUGEES, MOSTLY CHILEANS, UNDER UNHCR PROTECTION WERE KIDNAPPED BY BAND OF UNIDENTIFIED ARMED MEN IN BUENOS AIRES JUNE 11. ALL WERE RELEASED JUNE 12 SUFFERING FROM BEATINGS AND ELECTRIC TORTURE, UNDER THREAT OF DEATH IF THEY DID NOT LEAVE ARGENTINA WITHIN 48 HOURS (SEE REF A). UNHCR IS NOW SEARCHING FOR COUNTRIES TO GIVE VISAS TO THOSE THREATENED. GOA HAS MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENT ON INCIDENT, BUT IS PLACED IN EMBARRASSING POSITION DUE OFFICIAL STATEMENT SHORTLY BEFORE KIDNAPPINGS THAT "REFUGEES IN NO SPECIFIC DANGER" (SEE REF B). GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES THIS AND EARLIER REFUGEE INCIDENTS, CONCLUSION ALMOST INESCAPABLE THAT GOA SECURITY FORCES EITHER DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE OR AT  
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LEAST TOLERATING EXTRA-OFFICIAL ACTIONS. EMBASSY SUGGESTS DEPARTMENT RAISE THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE WITH MARTINEZ DE HOZ IN WASHINGTON. END SUMMARY.

2. THE WEEKEND KIDNAPPING AND TORTURE OF 24 FOREIGN REFUGEES FOLLOWING THEFT OF REFUGEE DOCUMENTS FROM CATHOLIC COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION JUNE 9 (REF C) HAS REPORTEDLY SPREAD TERROR AMONG THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES IN ARGENTINA. IT HAS ALSO EMBARRASSED THE NOW SILENT GOA, WHICH INSISTED LAST FRIDAY, JUNE 11, THAT FOREIGN REFUGEES HAD NO "SPECIFIC DANGER" TO FEAR IN ARGENTINA. TWENTY-FOUR REFUGEES IN BUENOS AIRES UNDER UNHCR PROTECTION--23 CHILEAN, ONE URUGUAYAN-- AND THE PARAGUAYAN HOTEL CLERK WERE KIDNAPPED, BEATEN, TORTURED AND FREED JUNE 11-12 AND WARNED TO "LEAVE ARGENTINA WITHIN 48 HOURS OR BE KILLED." UNHCR OFFICIALS ARE FRANTICALLY SEEKING FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN WHICH TO RELOCATE THE THREATENED REFUGEES, BUT AS OF JUNE 14 HAD ONLY SECURED TWO PLACES IN NETHERLANDS, TWO IN CANADA AND UP TO FIVE IN SWEDEN. (UNHCR REP TOLD EMBOFFS JUNE 14 THAT UNHCR/GENEVA WAS ASKED TO REQUEST ASYLUM IN THE US FOR REFUGEES ENDANGERED IN ARGENTINA.)

3. ACCORDING TO UNHCR REP, THE REFUGEES REPORTED THEY WERE INTERROGATED BY MAN THEY RECOGNIZED AS SECURITY OFFICERS FROM CHILE AND URUGUAY WHO HAD DOSSIERS ON EACH REFUGEE. WHILE UNDERGOING BEATINGS, ELECTRIC TORTURE AND RECORDED MUSIC AND SCREAMS, THE CHILEAN REFUGEES WERE QUESTIONED BY CHILEAN SECURITY OFFICERS AND THE ONE URUGUAYAN BY URUGUAYAN OFFICIAL WHOM THEY INSISTED THEY RECOGNIZED, THE UNHCR REP SAID. INTERROGATING TEAMS HAD RECORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE REFUGEES, APPARENTLY FROM THE DOCUMENTS STOLEN FROM THE CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION COMMISSION AND FILES FROM THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, ACCORDING TO UNHCR REP WHO SPENT MOST OF THE WEEKEND WITH THE TERRORIZED REFUGEES. VICTIMS WERE ASKED ABOUT THEIR OWN ACTIVITIES AND ABOUT THE UNHCR AND TOLD TO LEAVE ARGENTINA WITHIN 48 HOURS OR BE KILLED. THEY TOLD UNHCR REP THAT THEY WERE BROUGHT TO OLD BUILDING THAT WAS WELL EQUIPPED WITH "TORTURE APPARATUS."

4. THE KIDNAPPINGS WERE VERY QUIETLY PLAYED IN ALL BUENOS AIRES PRESS EXCEPT ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BA HERALD, WHICH RAN WEEKEND PAGE ONE STORIES, A SUNDAY FEATURE DESCRIBING THE

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KIDNAPPINGS UNDER HEADING, "AN ILL WIND BLOWS," AND A MONDAY MORNING EDITORIAL IMPLORING GOVT TO STOP UNEXPLAINED VIGILANTE-TYPE KIDNAPPINGS WHICH ARE UNDERMINING ITS IMAGE ABROAD.

5. THERE ARE CURRENTLY 2000 REFUGEES UNDER UNHCR PROTECTION HOUSED IN 14 HOTELS IN BUENOS AIRES, ANOTHER 2000 IN MENDOZA AND MORE IN OTHER PROVINCIAL ARGENTINE CITIES. UNHCR IN ARGENTINA AND GENEVA IS APPEALING DIRECTLY TO MORE THAN 20 COUNTRIES TO PROVIDE SAFE HAVEN FOR THOSE THREATENED. (UNHCR REP WOULD WELCOME AN EXTENSION OF CHILEAN PAROLE PROGRAM OR OTHER US ASSISTANCE ON BEHALF OF THE REFUGEES. HE TOLD EMBOFFS THAT NONE OF THE 25 THREATENED WERE "ECONOMIC REFUGEES" OR HIGHLY POLITICIZED; PERHAPS FIVE OR MORE WERE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY.)

6. ON JUNE 14 CALL ON HIGH FONMIN OFFICIAL, CHARGE DISCUSSED HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ARGENTINA (SEPTEL).

7. COMMENT:

PATTERN OF KIDNAPPING AND MURDER OF FOREIGN REFUGEES IN ARGENTINA CANNOT FAIL TO SUGGEST DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF ELEMENTS ARGENTINE SECURITY FORCES OR AT LEAST THEIR ACQUIESCENCE. THE KIDNAPPING OF GUTIERREZ RUIZ--A NOISY, HOUR-LONG AFFAIR AT HIS APARTMENT BUILDING-- AND THE VIOLENT ROUNDUP OF 25 FOREIGNERS BY APPROXIMATELY 40 ARMED AND HOODED MEN NEAR THE LOCAL POLICE STATION BOTH OCCURRED ENTIRELY UNIMPEDED BY LOCAL POLICE. IF, AS REFUGEES REPORTED TO UNHCR REP, CHILEAN AND URUGUAYAN SECURITY FORCES PARTICIPATED IN KIDNAPPING AND INTERROGATION OF VICTIMS, IT SUGGESTS CLOSE COORDINATION OF SOUTHERN CONE SECURITY FORCES TO ERADICATE WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO BE SUBVERSION AND TO TERRORIZE REFUGEES. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT HAVE INFORMATION UPON WHICH TO EVALUATE REFUGEES' ALLEGATIONS.

7. GOA, NOW TWICE EMBARRASSED BY OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS ON SECURITY OF FOREIGN REFUGEES--FIRST, THAT TORRES'S DISAPPEARANCE COULD BE CASUALLY EXPLAINED AWAY AND THEN THAT FOREIGN REFUGEES WERE IN "NO SPECIFIC DANGER", BOTH OF WHICH WERE IMMEDIATELY REFUTED BY SUBSEQUENT EVENTS--HAS CHOSEN TO REMAIN QUIET FOR THE TIME BEING.

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8. CATHOLIC BISHOPS SENT A STRONG STATEMENT ON REFUGEE INCIDENT TO GOA, WHICH HAS NOT BEEN PUBLICLY RELEASED, ACCORDING TO UNHCR REP.

9. IN PAST, ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ HAS SAID (SINCERELY, WE BELIEVE) THAT GOA IN NO WAY RESPONSIBLE FOR RIGHT-WING TERRORIST ACTS SUCH AS MICHELINI/GUTIERREZ RUIZ MURDERS AND THAT THEY MORE LIKELY REPRESENTED EFFORT ON PART OF EXTREME LEFT TO EMBARRASS GOA. IN EMBASSY VIEW THIS POSITION IS SIMPLY NO LONGER SUSTAINABLE. EMBASSY HOPES MARTINEZ DE HOZ VISIT TO US IS SUCCESS AND WE WOULD NOT SUGGEST HE RECEIVE ANYTHING LESS THAN WARM RECEPTION. HOWEVER, DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO TAKE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPRESS UPON HIM IN WASHINGTON (AS WE HAVE TRIED TO DO HERE) THAT IF SUCH ACTS AS JUNE 11 MASS KIDNAPPING CONTINUE WITHOUT EFFECTIVE MEASURES ON PART OF GOA TO BRING THEM UNDER CONTROL, SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES COULD RESULT FOR US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS.  
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