

Lawyers investigate French deaths during Argentina's dirty war

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA--A lawyer representing the families of two French nuns who disappeared during Argentina's "dirty war" in the late 1970's has persuaded a federal court to demand a list of people who died during that period.

Horacio Menendez Carreras says he is certain the Argentinian navy has a list of those killed or disappeared. The nuns were among 4,000 who were kidnapped and later killed, and the 9,000 reported to have disappeared after being detained at the infamous Naval School of Mechanics in Buenos Aires. Argentinian naval captain Adolfo Scilingo had accused church officials of providing justification for the torture and murders of dissidents during the unrest. Scilingo said that between 1,500 and 2,000 detainees were thrown alive into the ocean from Navy and Marine airplanes.

The two nuns, Alice Doman and Leonie Duquet were taken from a Buenos Aires church in 1977 and never seen again.

The case brought world-wide attention last October when French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe visited Argentina and asked the government to clear up the situation once and for all.

Juppe said his government has not forgotten the nuns, and believes they were killed.

Two weeks before the Minister's visit, two navy officials who were candidates for promotion made public statements on the use of torture during the government's clashes with guerrilla movements in the late 70's.

When they were kidnapped, the two sisters were working with a group of Argentinian women who were seeking clues about others who had been tortured and had disappeared.

Menendez-Carreras said that the list "would be official confirmation they were held there, that they were kidnapped, tortured and killed by the navy. It's very important for their families who want to recover their bodies or at least know what their fate was."

Church and human rights groups have also called on Argentinian president Carlos Menem for a list of those who are missing.

Mendez Carreras said Argentina would not send convicted military torturers and killers back to jail, since they had been pardoned by democratic governments in the "Due Obedience" law of 1987 and the Amnesty of 1989.

But Argentina's most famous human rights group, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, called a protest at the Naval School of Mechanics to demand punishment.

"It is not enough to denounce these disgraceful acts. We want to know who committed them! We demand jail for all the culprits," the Mothers said.

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