

Scientists Aid Search for Argentina's "Desaparecidos"

A team of four forensic scientists, assembled by the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility (CSFR), traveled to Argentina in March 1985 to direct a 5-week training workshop in the identification of human skeletal remains.

The invitation to conduct the training came from the Argentine government's human rights secretariat, the agency now in charge of determining the identities of thousands of persons killed during military rule from 1976 to 1983. The Ford Foundation, as part of a grant in support of the Association's human rights activities, provided funding for the trip.

In June 1984 the AAAS sent a delegation of scientists to Argentina to observe the medical and scientific investigation of the human remains of the "disappeared" and to make recommendations to the National Commission on "Disap-

peared." The Commission has now completed its inquiry into the circumstances regarding the "disappearance" of more than 9000 persons abducted by the security forces in the 1970's. Most are assumed to have been killed. The bodies of the missing, or "desaparecidos," as they are known in Argentina, were often buried in a single or mass grave marked with the legend "N.N."—for "unidentified."

In September 1984, the Commission recommended that the government begin a concerted effort to identify and determine the cause of death of the "disappeared." As a first step, the Commission suggested that teams of scientists should be trained in the archeological techniques used to open graves and remove skeletal remains. The AAAS agreed to assist in the training. Twenty participants, ranging from practicing scientists to undergraduate students in archeology

and anthropology, attended the workshop held at the University of Buenos Aires Medical School.

For the first 2 weeks of the training, Clyde C. Snow, a forensic anthropologist from Oklahoma and director of the workshop, led a team of six students in the excavation of ten "N.N." graves.

During the second week of lab work, Snow was joined by John J. Fitzpatrick, a radiologist from Cook County (Illinois) Hospital; Robert H. Kirschner, a pathologist and deputy medical examiner for Cook County; and Lowell Levine, a forensic odontologist from Nassau County, New York. Besides trying to establish identity, Snow and his teammates instructed the students on how to determine the cause of death.

The Case of Liliana Pereyra

One case, that of 21-year-old Liliana Carmen Pereyra Azzarri, is indicative of the undertaking.

According to her landlord, naval personnel abducted Liliana, who was 5 months pregnant, on 5 October 1977. The police reportedly informed her mother that Liliana had been killed in a shoot-out on 15 July 1978. An autopsy report, obtained later, shows that Liliana had been buried in "El Parque" cemetery.

What had happened to Liliana between October 1977 and July 1978?

Liliana's mother, fearful that inquiries to the police could lead to reprisals against her family, waited until the military left power in November 1983. She then began to check the cemetery log for the physical characteristics of the "unidentified" buried in "El Parque" during July 1978. The physical details given in one entry matched those of Liliana.

Meanwhile, human rights investigators had received testimony from three women, all former prisoners, who said they were detained with Liliana between November 1977 and February 1978 in a naval detention facility in Buenos Aires. According to the women, Liliana gave birth to a boy, and a few days later Navy personnel took her away.

In early March 1985, Liliana's mother heard that a group of forensic scientists were attempting to identify the "disappeared." She approached Snow, and arrangements were made to take the students to "El Parque." On 9 March, the grave presumed to be that of Liliana was

Instruments and Lab Equipment Needed

At the request of the Government of Argentina, AAAS' Office of International Science (OIS) has agreed to assist with donations of used or surplus instruments and equipment for use by Argentine universities, hospitals, and research laboratories. OIS has agreed, for 1 year, to help identify potential donors, furnish information about items most urgently needed, and put donors in contact with appropriate Argentine officials.

Argentina is facing an extremely difficult economic situation, in which President Raúl Alfonsín is applying measures of tight austerity. At the same time, the democratically elected government is trying to rebuild the universities and restore scientific research in Argentina after years of neglect. Some Argentine scientists living abroad have returned and others are helping in different ways, but equipment replacement is a key constraint.

Transportation of donated equipment is being furnished free by the national shipping company (ELMA) and Aerolineas Argentinas, and customs and tax facilitations are provided. Donated material will be furnished only to nonprofit and governmental institutes and may not be sold.

Illustrative of the many kinds of items urgently needed are high-performance liquid chromatography systems, various centrifuges, portable x-rays, electron microscopes, computers for cardiograph research, -20° freezers, cell incubators and sterilizers, oscilloscopes, water distillers, and laminar flow apparatus.

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