

PARAGUAY

In 2005, EAAF participated in an Argentine delegation to Paraguay to collaborate with the *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia* (Commission for Truth and Justice). EAAF made recommendations on obtaining, organizing, and archiving information on disappearances in order for the evidence to be useful in future forensic investigations and judicial proceedings.

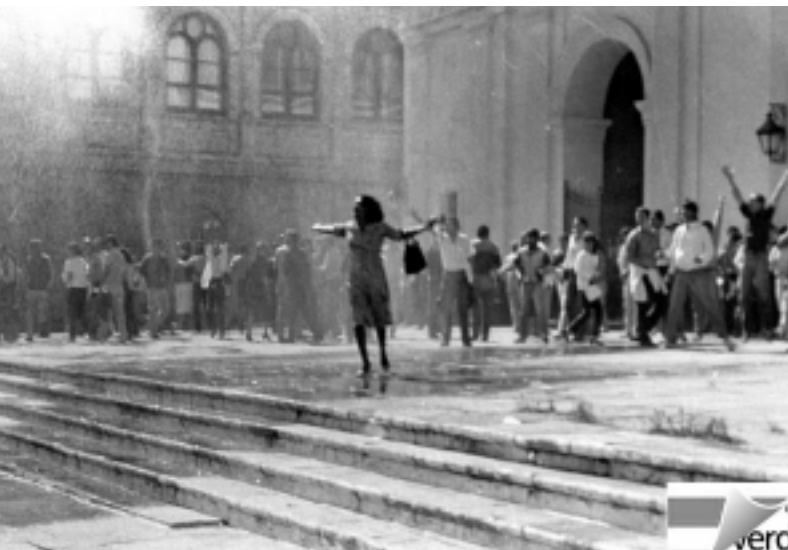
BACKGROUND

In May 1954, following twenty-seven years of political instability in Paraguay, during which twenty-two presidents held office, General Alfredo Stroessner, supported by members of the right-wing *Colorado* party and the armed forces, orchestrated a military coup, ousting President Federico Chávez from office.¹ Stroessner served eight consecutive terms in office over the next thirty-five years. The constitution was amended in 1967 and 1977 to permit his re-election.²

According to numerous reports, Stroessner's regime was marked by grave human rights violations,

including torture, kidnapping, and assassination of dissidents.³ Stroessner reportedly exaggerated the threat presented by communists in Paraguay to justify this persecution and to obtain financial and political support from the United States.⁴ The Stroessner government also participated in Operation Condor, a covert agreement reached by South American governments during the 1970s and 1980s to exchange counter-intelligence and political prisoners.⁵

In 1989, General Andrés Rodríguez, supported by a segment of the Army, ousted Stroessner in a military coup. Later that year, Rodríguez instituted the first multi-party elections, winning the presidency as the *Colorado* party candidate. He served until 1993, when



(Above left) Citizens in Asunción, capital of Paraguay, celebrate the return of democracy. (At right) The police suppress a public demonstration during Stroessner's regime. Photos courtesy of *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia*. *Última Hora* newspaper archives.

a civilian president, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, was elected.⁶ The transition to more democracy has not been smooth, and political unrest reportedly continues in the country. There were two failed military coup attempts in 1996 and 2000, and President Raúl Cubas resigned in 1999 in the midst of impeachment proceedings following the assassination of his vice-president.⁷

Stroessner fled to Brazil in February 1989, where he obtained political asylum. In 2000, a Paraguayan judge issued an order calling for his arrest and extradition.⁸ Stroessner and his former Minister of the Interior, Sabino Augusto Montanaro, would have faced charges in Paraguay related to the forced “disappearance” of Agustín Goiburú, a Paraguayan doctor who disappeared in Argentina in 1977.⁹ While his lawyer claimed that the extradition order was ineffective because Stroessner had secured political asylum,¹⁰ human

Known as the
“Terror Archive,”
 the files document the
 repression in the Southern
 Cone during Operation
 Condor and include
 thousands of cases
 of people who
 were reportedly
 arrested, killed,
 tortured, and
 disappeared
 between 1954 and 1989.

rights organizations argued that Brazil was bound by the Convention against Torture to take legal action against human rights violators.¹¹ In August 2006, Stroessner died of pneumonia while still in exile in Brazil.¹²

In December 1992, Dr. Martín Almada, a Paraguayan lawyer and former political prisoner, and a Paraguayan judge, José Fernández, found thousands of files in the

attic of a building that once served as the Office of Political and Related Matters of the Intelligence Police of Asunción.¹² Known as the “Terror Archive,” the files document the repression in the Southern Cone during Operation Condor and include thousands of cases of people who were reportedly arrested, killed, tortured, and disappeared between 1954 and 1989.¹⁴

A random sampling of the archives by Andrew



(Above left) The Terror Archive gave rise to the *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia* in Paraguay. The documents found in the archive incriminate high-ranking military officials involved in Plan Condor throughout Latin America, including Augusto Pinochet. *(At right)* Police repression and persecution of dissidents were common currency during Stroessner’s 34-year regime. Photos courtesy of *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia*. *Última Hora* newspaper archives.



A small portion of the thousands of files found in December 1992, known as the *Terror Archive*, which documented the thousands of cases of people who had reportedly been arrested, killed, tortured and disappeared by State forces. *Photo by EAAF.*

Nickson, an economist at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, includes:

Volume 4, telephone tapping from September to November of 1984; Volume 36, surveillance of persons entering and leaving Paraguay; Volume 40, surveillance of the independent teachers' union (*Organización de Trabajadores de la Educación del Paraguay*, OTEP); Volume 47, the inaugural meeting of Operation Condor....¹⁵

According to Nickson, the archive also showed that some surveillance groups continued operating after Stroessner's removal.¹⁶ In 1993, with the support of UNESCO, the Supreme Court of Paraguay established the Center for Documentation and Archives for the Defense of Human Rights to develop a database of the "Terror Archive," preserve the documents, and disseminate the information they contain.¹⁷

In June 2004, the Paraguayan government formally established the *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia* (Commission for Truth and Justice, CVJ) to

investigate human rights violations that occurred during the Stroessner dictatorship.¹⁸

EAAF Participation

EAAF has conducted five missions to Paraguay since 1993. During these trips, the team has provided technical advice on remains thought to correspond to people disappeared during the Stroessner regime and has examined the "Terror Archive," gathering information on the disappearance of Argentine citizens in Paraguay and of Paraguayan citizens in Argentina.

In October 2005, EAAF members Daniel Bustamante and Darío Olmo traveled to Asunción with two officials from the Argentine Secretary of Human Rights (SDH), Emilia Judith Said and Javier Mariezcurrena to collaborate with the CVJ. The *Fondo Argentino de Cooperación Horizontal* (FO-AR), a special fund administered by the Argentine State Department, sponsored the trip.¹⁹

The members of the delegation held meetings with NGOs, government and United Nations representatives, journalists, and a coalition comprised of the Committee of Churches, the Almada Foundation, and Diakonia (Swedish Ecumenical Action). EAAF also collaborated closely with the Argentine Embassy during the mission.

The purpose of the mission was to promote and strengthen the CVJ, which is composed of nine commissioners: the national Chancellor, representing the executive branch, Dr. Benítez Florentín, representing the legislative branch, four members from the victims' commissions, and three other officials. EAAF advised the CVJ on gathering evidence related to political disappearances, particularly focusing on cases of Paraguayans disappeared in Argentina and on carrying out its mandate in the future.

EAAF made recommendations on obtaining, organizing, and archiving information on disappearances in order for the evidence to be admissible in eventual judicial proceedings, noting the fact that in Paraguay there are no legal impediments in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for human rights violations.

In particular, EAAF recommended:

- The search for “N.N.” (John/Jane Doe) records at local public cemeteries, since the remains of forcibly disappeared people may have been legally buried.
- The creation of a database of possible clandestine burial sites that could be readily available for future archaeological investigations, and that could be cross-referenced with the findings from “N.N.” records from the cemeteries and from historical investigations.
- The creation of a genetic databank initially containing samples from relatives of victims of

forced disappearance and extra-judicial executions. To date, exhumations related to these cases have not been conducted. However, the genetic profiles of the family members can be compared to those extracted from remains recovered in future investigations.

The CVJ is currently advancing investigations on forced disappearances and applying EAAF's recommendations.

ENDNOTES

1. Molinas, José, Pérez Linan, Aníbal, and Saiagh, Sebastián. Political Institutions, Policymaking Processes, and Policy Outcomes in Paraguay, 1954-2003. *Rev. cienc. polít.* Santiago, 24(2). 2004. p. 67-93. http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0718-090X2004000200004&lng=es&nrm=iso
2. Cuya, Esteban. CIPAE. Paraguay Nunca Más. *Las comisiones de la Verdad en América Latina*. September 1996. <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/doc/verdad.html#par>.
3. See *Paraguay Nunca Más*, CIPAE, 1990; *Koága Roneta* (Now we shall speak), Peasant Testimony of the Repression in Misiones, 1976-1978, published by the Catholic Church of Misiones; International Center for Transitional Justice. *Paraguay: ICTJ Activity*. <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/region2/596.html>.
4. Mora, Frank O. “The Forgotten Relationship: United States-Paraguay Relations, 1937-89.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33(3): 451-473. 1998.
5. McSherry, J. Patrice. Operation Condor: Clandestine Inter-American System. *Social Justice*. 26(4). Winter 1999. p. 144.
6. Mora, Frank O. Review: The Transition to Democracy in Paraguay. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 40(2): 177-181. 1998.
7. Amnesty International. *Public Statement: Paraguay: The New Government Must End Impunity*. March 31, 1999. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR450021999?open&of=ENG-PRY>
8. Human Rights Watch. *Paraguay: Stroessner Extradition Effort Hailed*. December 11, 2000. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2000/12/11/paragu632.htm>.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Amnesty International. *Amnesty International Report 2003: Paraguay*. [http://www.amnesty.org.ru/web/web.nsf/report2003/Pry-summary-eng/\\$FILE/paraguay.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.ru/web/web.nsf/report2003/Pry-summary-eng/$FILE/paraguay.pdf).
11. Human Rights Watch, *Paraguay: Stroessner Extradition Effort Hailed*, December 2000. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2000/12/11/paragu632.htm>.
12. Schemo, Diana Jean. “Stroessner, Paraguay's Enduring Dictator, Dies.” *The New York Times*. August 16, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/16/world/americas/16cndstroessner.html?ei=5088&en=cd9da45f8ae57041&ex=1313380800&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all>.
13. *Sección Política y Afines de la Policía de Investigación de Asunción*
14. Cuya, Esteban. CIPAE. Paraguay Nunca Más. *Las comisiones de la Verdad en América Latina*. September 1996. <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/doc/verdad.html#par>.
15. Nickson, R. Andrew. Paraguay's Archivo del Terror. *Latin American Research Review*, 30(1): 125-129. 1995. p. 128.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Corte Suprema de Justicia de Paraguay, Asunción. *Centro de documentación y archivo para la defensa de los derechos humanos*. <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/paraguay/index.html>.
18. International Center for Transitional Justice. *Paraguay: ICTJ Activity*. <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/region2/596.html>.
19. The Fo-AR, or *Fondo Argentino de Cooperación Horizontal*, is a program of the State Department of Argentina to stimulate cooperation among Latin American researchers in different fields of expertise.