

14 December 1979

Presidente Jorge Rafael Videla  
Casa Rosada  
Baicarge 50  
Buenos Aires Argentina

Dear Mr. President:

We have the honour of addressing you on behalf of the members of The Newspaper Guild of The United States and the National Union of Journalists of Great Britain to express our concern about the plight of Argentine journalists who have been arrested or who have disappeared.

As journalists we are well aware of the difficult period your country has lived through and of the wave of political violence prompted by various ideological points of view which have swept Argentina during the past few years.

However we cannot remain indifferent to the fate of our Argentine colleagues who have been persecuted for no apparent reason. According to our information, more than 300 Argentine journalists are being held without charges. Perhaps there is some legal reason for their arrest, in which case we respectfully request that they be charged and put on trial with full legal guarantees. If, however, no charges can be brought against them, we believe that they should be set free immediately or given the right of option to leave the country.

We are especially concerned about the situation of some 60 journalists whose whereabouts remain unknown. Most of them were seen being arrested by men who identified themselves as members of the Argentine security forces. Their relatives have filed habeas corpus writs, visited police stations and written to military authorities--all to no avail.

We believe that the relatives of our disappeared colleagues have the right to know the reason for their disappearance and their present whereabouts. We also feel that it is our professional duty to join our voice to those of the relatives of missing journalists who are demanding justice. If our missing colleagues are not being held by the Argentine security forces, we hope Mr. President, that an immediate investigation will be launched to establish the reasons for their disappearance and their present status.

We are aware that your government has repeatedly stated that it will respect freedom of information and strive to maintain a free and independent press.

We believe that the plight of the missing or detained Argentine journalists undermines these objectives and contributes to create a negative image of your country abroad.

Your government has repeatedly complained of negative articles written about the situation in Argentina by foreign newspapers. We fear that it will be very difficult for a foreign journalist to give a positive view of Argentina when so many of his colleagues in your country are being persecuted for reasons known only to the Argentine authorities.

No foreign journalist covering Argentina can easily forget that so many of his Argentine colleagues have been abducted or arrested.

We trust, Mr. President, that your government will heed the plea of our colleagues' families and find a rapid solution to this lamentable and tragic situation. We hope that you will soon be able to tell Argentina and the world that journalists in your country again are able to work freely, without fear of being arrested or abducted.

Sincerely,

SIGNED

Charles Perlik, Jr.  
President  
The Newspaper Guild  
1125 25th Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20005

Jake Ecclestone  
President  
National Union of Journalists  
314 Grays-Inn Road  
London WC1, England