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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

Release Excise Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: In Part In Full

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[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 0530

E.O. 12065 1-17-85 (HARRIS, F. ALLEN) OR-P
TAGS SHUM, AR
SUBJECT BEACHED CADAVERS TRIGGER JUDICIAL INQUIRY

REF: 78 BUENOS AIRES 1919

1. (U) PRESS COVERAGE -- LOCAL PRESS AND WIRE SERVICES
CARRIED STORIES ON DECEMBER 20 AND 22 OF BODIES BEING
WASHED ASHORE ON ARGENTINE ATLANTIC RESORT BEACHES.
THESE ACCOUNTS REPORTED THAT BETWEEN 11 AND 15 BODIES HAD
BEEN FOUND IN ADVANCED STATE OF DECOMPOSITION OVER A
16 MILE STRETCH OF BEACH, 210 MILES SOUTHEAST OF BUENOS
AIRES.

2. [REDACTED] A REPORTER FROM CLARIN WAS SENT TO THE AREA
TO WRITE A STORY ON THE REPORTS. ACCORDING TO A COLLEAGUE,
HE RETURNED AGHAST AT WHAT HE SAW AND HEARD.
THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH FIREMEN, POLICEMEN, AND LOCAL
RESIDENTS HE ACUMULATED REPORTS OF 38 BODIES WASHED ASHORE.
IMMEDIATELY UPON HIS RETURN, THE EDITOR OF CLARIN
RECEIVED A CALL FROM THE PRESIDENCY'S PRESS OFFICE

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INDICATING THAT IT WOULD BE INCONVENIENT TO RUN ANY
MORE STORIES REGARDING THE BODIES. THE REPORTER

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DID AN INTERNAL MEMO AND THE STORY WAS DROPPED.

3. (U) MOTHERS INVESTIGATE -- IN RESPONSE TO THE PRESS STORIES, THREE MOTHERS OF THE PAZA DE MAYO VISITED THE BEACH AREA ON DECEMBER 26. THERE THEY MET WITH THE CRIMINAL JUDGE OF DOLORES DISTRICT, A DR. FACIO, WHO INFORMED THEM THAT HE HAD OPENED A CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRESUMED HOMICIDES. DR. FACIO REPORTED THAT A TOTAL OF 17 BODIES HAD BEEN FOUND, MOSTLY OF MALES. JUDGE VACIO SAID THAT REMAINS APPEARED TO BE OF YOUNG PERSONS WHO WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN IN THE WATER FOR UP TO TWO MONTHS. FACIO REPORTED THAT MANY OF THE BODIES WERE FOUND WITHOUT HANDS, AND A NUMBER WITHOUT HEADS. HE SAID THAT LOCAL POLICE HAD REMOVED THE AVAILABLE HANDS FROM THE BODIES AND SENT THEM TO THE PROVINCIAL POLICE LABORATORY AT LA PLATA FOR IDENTIFICATION. NO REPORTS HAVE YET BEEN RECEIVED BY THE JUDGE.

4. (U) THE MOTHERS RETURNED TO DOLORES ON JANUARY 5 TO FOLLOW UP ON THE JUDICIAL AND POLICE INVESTIGATION. THEY WERE TOLD THAT THE BODIES HAD BEEN BURIED. AFTER INITIALLY REFUSING, THE LOCAL JUDICIAL OFFICIALS ACCEPTED HABEAS CORPUS PETITIONS FROM THE MOTHERS.

5. (U) THESE REAPPEARANCES HAVE LED A NUMBER OF PLAZA DE MAYO MOTHERS TO PRESENT HABEAS CORPUS PETITIONS REQUESTING THAT THE JUDICIARY VERIFY THAT--
A. THE BODIES WASHED UP ON THE ATLANTIC BEACHES,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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B. THE ALLEGED TERRORISTS REPORTED KILLED IN SHOOT OUTS IN ROSARIO AND IN MAR DEL PLATA,
C. PERSONS REPORTED TO HAVE DIED MYSTERIOUSLY IN THE ONTIVEROS PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY, D. THE TWO PRISONERS REPORTED POISONED AT AN UNNAMED POLICE STATIONS, AND E. THREE BODIES BURNED AT LA SALADA ARE NOT THEIR MISSING CHILDREN.
THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY HAS REPEATED THESE POINTS GENERALLY IN PETITIONS PRESENTED TO THE SUPREME COURT AND TO PRESIDENT VIDELA.

6. (U) OTHER REPORTS -- NAVY SOURCES RESPONDED

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TO AN EMBASSY INQUIRY WHEN THE NEWS STORIES FIRST APPEARED WITH INFORMATION THAT THE BODIES WERE MEMBERS OF THE CREW OF THE URUGUAYAN VESSEL WHICH HAD SUNK IN MID-DECEMBER 1978.

7. (U) A COLLEAGUE OF AN EMBASSY CONTACT REPORTED HAVING SEEN ONE OF THE CADAVERS WHILE VACATIONING IN THE AREA. THIS SOURCE DESCRIBED THE MALE CADAVER HE SAW AS BEING "FRESH" IN APPEARANCE.

8. [REDACTED] PERMANENT ASSEMBLY SOURCES HAVE INFORMED US THAT THEY BELIEVE THAT THE BODIES WERE DROPPED INTO THE OCEAN FROM AIRCRAFT OPERATING FROM THE NAVAL AIR STATION AT NEARBY PUNTO INDIO. THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED A NUMBER OF REPORTS OF "PACKAGES" BEING DROPPED INTO THE OCEAN OFF THE COAST BY MILITARY AIRCRAFT.

9. [REDACTED] EMBASSY COMMENT: THERE WERE SIMILAR REPORTS OF BEACHED CADAVERS DURING FEBRUARY-MARCH OF LAST YEAR.
(SEE REFTTEL.) NONE OF LAST YEAR'S CADAVERS WERE EVER PUBLICLY OR (TO OUR KNOWLEDGE) PRIVATELY IDENTIFIED.

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[REDACTED]
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10. [REDACTED] THE LACK OF IDENTIFICATION HAS NOW BECOME AN ISSUE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS HERE. THEY ARE NOW INSISTING THAT THE GOVERNMENT NOT ONLY EXPLAIN THE FATE OF THE MANY DISAPPEARED, BUT THAT THE EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES PUBLICLY IDENTIFY THOSE FEW VICTIMS WHOSE BODIES DO, IN FACT, REAPPEAR. END COMMENT.
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