Whereabouts of Salvadoran Doctor Sought

Efforts continue in El Salvador and the United States to obtain information on the whereabouts of Dr. Carlos Vargas Lopez, abducted by armed men on 16 December 1981 in downtown San Salvador. Despite repeated appeals by family members, international human rights organizations, and 52 U.S. Congressmen, no official notification of his detention and legal situation has been provided by the Salvadoran authorities.

According to Vargas' family, eye witnesses have said that a group of ten men armed with machine guns were parked in front of Vargas' clinical laboratory an hour before the abduction took place. During that time, a truck with National Guard members passed by in full view of the armed men without questioning them. At 4:30 pm, Vargas told fellow workers at the clinic that he was going Christmas shopping and stepped outside. He walked about 100 feet when three of the armed men stopped him. When he resisted, the other men came up and struck him with the butts of their machine guns. Vargas was then tied and gagged, thrown into the back of a truck, and driven away.

Vargas, 31, is a 1977 graduate with high honors from the School of Medicine of the National University of El Salvador. In 1979, he was hired as a lecturer in physiology at the medical school. Vargas, along with other doctors, became active in 1980 in the Committee in Defense of Patients, Medical Workers and Health Institutions, an organization formed in response to attacks by security forces and paramilitary groups on patients and staff in clinics and hospitals throughout the country. When the military occupied and closed down the university in May 1980, Vargas returned to private practice, taking over his father's clinical laboratory in the center of the city. It was from there that he was abducted.

In response to a letter sent to the Salvadoran embassy in Washington on 21 December 1981 by the Clearinghouse, Ambassador Ernesto Rivas-Gallant sent a telex to the Minister of Interior in El Salvador requesting information on Vargas' whereabouts and legal situation. Despite further correspondence with the Embassy, the Clearinghouse has received no word on Vargas' situation. The Clearinghouse has referred the case to the American Medical Association, the World Medical Association, the Institute of Medicine, and the National Academy of Sciences' Human Rights Committee.

In a letter sent to President Napoleon Duarte on 11 February 1982, 52 U.S. Representatives called on Duarte to investigate fully the circumstances surrounding Vargas' abduction. "If he is in the hands of civilians, we expect you to take steps to win his release and prosecute his abductors. If, on the other hand, (he) is being held by the government or any of its subdivisions, we demand his immediate release unless reasonable cause can be given for detaining him further", the letter said.

The Central Latin American Relief Organization (CLARO) announced in February 1982 that they are offering a $10,000 reward for Vargas' safe return. Much of the information received by CLARO and other organizations following the case has come from Vargas' sister, Evelyn Vargas-Castaneda, now living in Davis, California.

The present escalation of political violence in El Salvador has resulted in the deaths of several scientists—particularly medical personnel. A report issued by a commission of North American health professionals who travelled to El Salvador in July 1980 charges that "death squads and uniformed forces have repeatedly entered hospitals and clinics and shot down patients, doctors, nurses and medical students in cold blood." Information received by the Clearinghouse indicates that 17 doctors and health workers have "disappeared" in El Salvador since January 1981. Seven of those now missing were arrested by army soldiers on 11 January 1981 while working at the Red Cross health clinic in Chalatenango. Under the Geneva Convention nations are pledged to regard doctors and nurses as well as the sick and wounded as neutrals during military conflict. 

Dr. Carlos Vargas Lopez with his godchild.
AAAS Symposium Discusses Ethics and Torture

The AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility (CSFR) sponsored two events during the 1982 AAAS Annual Meeting to focus attention on the role of the medical profession in preventing the use of torture, and other inhumane treatment for political or psychiatric purposes. On 8 January, representatives from Amnesty International (AI) medical groups working in the United States and Canada presented their findings at a symposium entitled “Torture, Medical Practice and Medical Ethics.” The symposium was arranged by Dr. Michael Nelson, Chief of Psychiatric Services at Burbank Hospital in Boston and Chairperson, AIUSA Medical Capacity Committee.

Nelson told the AAAS meeting that torture had reached “epidemic proportions” in more than 30 countries. In his presentation, Nelson examined the rationale behind the systematic use of torture in a political state and the role that the implementation and monitoring of codes of medical ethics can play in the prevention of torture.

Dr. José Quiroga, a public health researcher at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, presented slides illustrating the various methods of torture and discussed the resulting physical and psychological sequelae. Viki Zunzunegui, a research statistician and graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, reviewed preliminary results from a statistical profile she has compiled on 46 Latin American torture victims who have come to the United States in recent years. She said the study revealed that the victims had been subjected to various forms of torture, including beatings, electric shock, stretching, submersion, burning and sexual abuse.

Carlos Sanabria, a former political prisoner in Argentina and participant in the study, told of his imprisonment without charge or trial for two and a half years. During the first three months of detention Sanabria said he was repeatedly tortured with electroshock and kept in isolation from other detainees. He stated that while in secret detention he received medical attention on two occasions: “One time during a torture session and while still blindfolded, a person listened to my heart and lungs with a stethoscope. Later, samples of my urine were collected after one of my kidneys was injured.”

Dr. Case Kolff, a Seattle physician, and Dr. Federic Allodi, a Toronto psychiatrist, described their work and findings in the psychological rehabilitation of torture victims. Psychiatric treatment of torture victims, Allodi told the meeting, involves a series of steps. First, the victim must feel he or she is in a safe environment. If the victim is unable to cope emotionally with the trauma of the experiences, he or she should enter therapy to address and resolve emotions regarding the experience and any subsequent feelings of humiliation or guilt. “For a favorable outcome (of treatment) to occur, the victim must retain an acceptable concept of himself or herself and of the world as a fairly secure and predictable place,” Allodi said.

Following the symposium, the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility hosted a luncheon which was attended by several representatives of medical associations, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the Institute of Medicine, and the AAAS Section N (Medical Sciences).

During the luncheon, Dr. Alfred Gellhorn, past president of the Council of International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) discussed ways in which scientific organizations, particularly in the medical area, could become more involved in human rights activities. Phyllis Taylor, a nurse and staff, AIUSA Medical Capacity Committee, then told the luncheon group of that committee’s efforts to support medical colleagues in foreign countries who refuse to participate in torture of psychiatric abuse.

South African Doctor Dies in Police Detention

The recent death of political detainee Dr. Neill Aggett while in the custody of South Africa’s security police has prompted the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA) to issue a statement calling for meetings between “authorities and MASA surrounding the physical and mental health care of detainees.”

Officials at Witwatersrand University and Rhodes University, as well as the Anglo-American Corporation, the Federal Chamber of Industries, and the Association Chambers of Commerce have also expressed concern regarding the circumstances of Aggett’s death.

Aggett, a 28 year-old doctor and official of the bi-racial Food and Canning Workers Union, apparently committed suicide on 5 February 1982 by hanging in his cell at security police headquarters, according to police officials. He had been in virtual incomunicado detention since his arrest without charge in December 1981 under South Africa’s security laws.

On 16 February 1982, following an assurance by the South African Minister of Police that inhuman and degrading interrogation methods were not used against detainees in the custody of security police, Parliament member Helen Szuza read into the record an account given by a fellow detainee of Aggett, alleging that the doctor had been brutally beaten during an interrogation by security police.
French Take Sakharov Appeal to Soviet Academy

Andrei D. Sakharov and his wife, Yelena G. Bonner, ended their 17-day fast last December when Soviet authorities bowed to the couple's demand for an exit visa for their daughter-in-law, Yelizaveta Alekseyeva, who now lives with her husband in the United States. Prior to the hunger strike, Sakharov sent a letter to foreign colleagues describing his unsuccessful efforts to obtain results through appeals to the Soviet science and government officials. In the letter he said that only a hunger strike could break through "the wall of misunderstanding, indifference and passivity" surrounding his repeated requests.

During the final days of the fast, two members of the French Academy of Science, Louis Michel and Jean Claude Pecker, traveled to Moscow to extend a personal invitation to Sakharov to attend the official ceremonies in Paris for his induction into the Academy. (Sakharov was elected a member of the French Academy in February 1981.) Although Michel and Pecker were unable to visit Sakharov, they did manage to meet with officials of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The following excerpt from their trip report describes their impressions of the role played by Soviet science officials during the fast.

With the efficient assistance of the French Embassy in Moscow, we were able to obtain (following eight days of phone calls!) an appointment with Academician Alexandrov, President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Academician Scriabin, Secretary of the Presidium, and Dobroletsy, Secretary of the Committee for Foreign Relations of the Academy and Dr. Dgorov, who acted as interpreter. We first requested that Sakharov be allowed to come to Paris for solemn meetings, on December 7th and 14th, 1981 of the two French Academies of which he is member. The reply was negative, on the grounds of Sakharov's possession of numerous secrets related to national defense. We then offered to meet Sakharov, in any location, in the presence of an official of the Soviet Academy, in order to present him with the Gold Medal symbolizing his membership in our academy. The reply was negative: Sakharov was assigned to residence in Gorky, it was said, precisely in order to cut his contacts with the foreigners who in the past had done him so much harm by their influence. We replied that such risks would be completely eliminated by the presence of Soviet Academy officials. We were then told that his health was far from satisfactory, due to the hunger strike. We then had the feeling that Academician Alexandrov was indeed seriously worried about the possible evolution of the hunger strike. We brought up the fact that Sakharov never had received the invitations to attend the ceremonies in Paris, although those invitations had been sent both directly and through the Academy in Moscow. Our Soviet colleagues expressed surprise. We handed them copies of the lost correspondence, and they promised us to start an investigation about the loss. We then severely criticized the dramatic isolation of Sakharov, deprived of scientific contacts and even of scientific reading. Our Soviet colleagues said they were surprised to learn that scientific papers and books sent from France were being returned or confiscated by the Soviet authorities. We thus obtained from them a second promise: they told us that they would do everything in their power to forward to Sakharov any scientific papers addressed to him through their channel. Finally, they again expressed their sorrow about Sakharov's situation. We told them that any dramatic outcome of Sakharov's hunger strike would badly damage scientific relations between French and Soviet scientists. They nodded and reiterated before we left their strong wish that Sakharov's situation would not end in any dramatic manner.

After being released from the hospital in December, Sakharov and his wife returned to their apartment on the outskirts of Gorky where the Soviet physicist is serving an indefinite term of administrative exile. Sakharov is reported to suffer from recurring spells of dizziness and headaches. Yelena Bonner recently told a New York Times reporter that last February her husband had suggested in a letter to Alexandrov that he be moved from Gorky to one of the Academy's sanatoriums in the Moscow area or in the Baltic republics. Bonner believes that to date Soviet Academy officials have taken no action concerning the request.

Soviet Scientists Lose Academic Degrees

The Los Angeles Times reported on 24 February 1982 that of the some 500 scientists who have applied to emigrate from the Soviet Union in recent years, about 45% or 225 have been dismissed from their research posts and 13% or 65 have lost or are in the process of losing academic degrees.

The following notarized letter, translated from Russian, was sent to Agronomist L.S. Stonov announcing the revocation of his academic degree:

3 December 1981
The Highest Attestation Commission (VAK)
at the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR
Moscow K-64, Mechnikov per. No. 5

To: L.D. Stonov

The VAK of the USSR informs you that following the request of the Scientific-Technical Council at the All-Union Research Institute on Chemical Means of Plant Protection addressed to the VAK of the USSR on 28 January 1981 (protocol No. 6-1); that it deprives you of the academic degree of a Candidate of Agricultural Sciences and the academic title of senior scientific worker. The diploma of the Candidate of Agricultural Sciences No. MSKH 003289 and the certificate of the senior scientific worker No. MSN 027299, are declared to be invalid and should be returned to the offices of the VAK of the USSR at the following address:
Moscow, No. 12, Griboyedova St.
Deputy Chief Academic Secretary
V.V. Davydov
ASSOCIATION NEWS

AAAS Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights

On 7 January 1982, Elliot Abrams, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, met with a delegation of representatives from several scientific and engineering societies. The group included: Kurt Gottfried, outgoing chair, and Andrew Sessler, incoming chair; American Physical Society's Committee for the International Freedom of Scientists; Fred Leone, Executive Director, American Statistical Association; Eduardo Sontag, chair, American Mathematical Society's Committee on Human Rights; Anthony Ralston, chair, Association for Computing Machinery's Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights; Thomas Eisner, CSFR Subcommittee on Science and Human Rights; and Eric Stover, Project Director, AAAS Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights.

Prior to the meeting, the AAAS staff prepared background information on 50 scientists and engineers from 15 countries who have been imprisoned or "disappeared" in violation of basic human rights standards. Eisner presented the list to Abrams with a letter requesting the assistance of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in providing additional information on the status of these persons. To date, the bureau has not replied to the AAAS letter.

On 7 January 1982, the AAAS Council adopted the following resolution proposed by the CSFR during the AAAS Annual Meeting in Washington. The resolution endorses immediate ratification of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948; it was submitted to the U.S. Senate for advice and consent to ratification in 1949 and resubmitted in 1970. Eighty-two nations are parties to the convention, but it has not yet been ratified by the United States.

Whereas American scientists are becoming more attentive to the plights of scientists and others who are victims of human rights violations and are becoming more aware of the importance of international standards to address such violations, and

Whereas the AAAS Board of Directors voted on 7 December 1979, to support U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Treaty), and

Whereas the Board urged the U.S. Senate to give its advice and consent to ratification of this important instrument for enhancing the human rights of all people, and

Whereas the continued lack of U.S. ratification of the Genocide Treaty contributes to the political isolation of the United States from the international community of nations which have supported the Treaty and detracts from our nation's formal commitment to the support of international standards for resolving human rights violations,

Therefore be it resolved that the AAAS Council affirms the 1979 action by the AAAS Board of Directors and urges immediate Senate ratification of the Genocide Treaty, and

Be it further resolved that the AAAS Council urges the President of the United States to support ratification of the Genocide Treaty, and

Be it further resolved that the AAAS encourages the societies and academies of science affiliated with AAAS to lend their support to U.S. ratification of the Genocide Treaty.

The Clearinghouse has been informed that funds for subscriptions to scholarly periodicals published outside the ruble zone have been cancelled for all Polish academic institutions and learned societies. Polish scholars are asking their foreign colleagues to send gift copies of scholarly journals to the central distributing address in Warsaw: Osrodek Rozpowszechniania Wydawnictw, Naukowych PAN ORPAN, Pkin 00901 Warszawa, Poland. The periodicals will be distributed by the Joint Commission of the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Conference of Rectors.

Recommended Reading


Claude, Richard, "International Human Rights: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," Occasional Paper No. 16, 1982. Send $3 to World Order Institute, Rm 2138M, Social Sciences, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742


Sirett, Hazel & Wiseberg, Laurie S. (eds.), Human Rights Directory: Western Europe, 1982. Send $30 non-members or $15 HRI members to Human Rights Internet, 1502 Ogden Street, NW, Washington DC 20010
American Statistical Association

The International Statistical Institute (ISI) held meetings in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 28 November to 11 December 1981. Prior to the meetings, Clearinghouse staff and members of the ASA Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights collaborated in developing a program for ASA members who wished to express their human rights concerns while attending the ISI gathering. In June 1981, the ASA committee sent an information packet to interested ASA and ISI members. The packet included a Clearinghouse report on *Scientists and Human Rights in Argentina Since 1976*; a National Academy of Sciences paper on “disappeared” scientists in Argentina; and a petition urging the Argentine authorities to disclose the whereabouts and legal situation of “disappeared” statisticians, Carlos Noriega and Graciela Mellibovsky. Approximate 250 signatures were obtained, including those of three ASA past Presidents and Fellows.

ASA Executive Director Fred Leone and Clearinghouse Project Director Eric Stover traveled to Buenos Aires to coordinate the human rights activities taking place in conjunction with the ISI meetings.

The Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), a private human rights group based in Buenos Aires, hosted meetings with ISI conference participants at their offices. A delegation of ASA officers and members, as well as the Chairman of the ISI Committee on Ethics, met with U.S. Embassy officials to solicit assistance in setting up meetings with the Argentine authorities. Although the ASA delegation was unable to meet with the authorities, on 9 December, Leone and Stover delivered the petition to the Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires. Copies of the petition were then distributed to the major newspapers and news agencies throughout the capital. On 20 December, the Buenos Aires daily, *La Prensa*, published the text of the petition including the names of 30 of the signatories.

American Public Health Association

The APHA Council passed a “resolution at that organization’s 1981 annual meeting in support of international human rights standards and authorized the APHA Executive Board to form a Committee on Human Rights. A panel on “Abuses in Human Rights and Medical Neutrality” was also held during the meetings in Los Angeles.

The text of the APHA Council resolution on human rights reads as follows:

**Whereas**, there is evidence of systematic violations of human rights, including torture and arbitrary imprisonment in a number of countries, and

**Whereas**, there is evidence that health workers are often the targets of these violations, and

**Whereas**, there is evidence that in certain instances other health workers have themselves participated in inflicting torture, and

**Whereas**, the American Public Health Association should have a special role in protesting such violations and protecting its victims,

**Moved**, that the Governing Council requests the Executive Board to form a Committee on Human Rights to monitor human rights violations, and to maintain contact with organizations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of Social Workers, and Amnesty International, and to take appropriate action.

American Physical Society

In recent months the APS Committee on the International Freedom of Scientists (CIFS) has been active on the case of Dr. Yeter Goksu Ogelman, a Turkish physicist arrested and imprisoned in May 1981. Ogelman, a specialist in thermoluminescence and a lecturer in physics at Cukurova University, co-authored a February 1974 article in *Science* on age determination of burnt flint by thermoluminescence method. She will have an article published shortly in *Nature*.

During the first 10 days of detention, Ogelman was reportedly confined to a small, windowless wooden box. On 15 January 1982, Ogelman was released on bail, pending trial for helping to organize a women’s rights movement between 1975 and 1977. Ogelman and other women arrested for their association with the Progressive Women’s Organization have told the Turkish courts that the group was formed to campaign for women’s rights and for improved education for women in Turkey. Amnesty International has taken up Ogelman’s case, and says that her arrest contravenes the European Convention of Human Rights, of which Turkey is a signatory. Ogelman’s trial was set to resume on 10 March. Although the APS and the Clearinghouse are monitoring the case closely, no new information on any trial proceedings has been received by either group.

American Political Science Association

The Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms of the American Political Science Association is examining the appropriate role of the APSA in protecting the academic rights of political scientists in foreign countries.

A roundtable discussion at the Midwest Political Science meeting will explore this issue. The discussion entitled “The Rights of Political Scientists in Other Countries: APSA’s Responsibility” will be held on 30 April, 1:30-3:30 pm at the Marc Plaza Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
AAAS Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights

Member Societies

All member societies are organizations affiliated with AAAS.

American Anthropological Association
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1703 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.
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(202) 232-9000

American Association of Biological Chemists
Dr. Jack Cohen
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NIH, Bldg. 2, Room 82-08
Bethesda, MD 20014
(301) 496-2704

American Association of Immunologists
Dr. Everly Conway de Macario
Chairperson, Committee on the Status of Women Division of Laboratory Research
New York State Department of Health
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12201

American Association of Scientific Workers
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(215) 243-8669

American Association of University Professors
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American Astronautical Society
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Optical Society of America
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Society of Industrial and Applied Mathematics
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Dr. Israel Baquero, Secretary
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AAAS CLEARINGHOUSE REPORT ON SCIENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The AAAS Clearinghouse is a project of the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility. The Committee is authorized by the AAAS Board and Council to monitor the actions of the governments of the United States and other nations which circumscribe the freedom of scientists or restrict the ability of scientists to exercise their professional responsibilities, and to report on developments affecting scientific freedom and responsibility. The Clearinghouse collects and disseminates information about foreign scientists who are victims of government persecution. It is designed to assist those who wish to bring effective aid to foreign scientists who are in serious trouble. The concerns of the Clearinghouse and the AAAS Committee are universal and independent of the ideology of any government or that of any government or the individuals they attempt to aid.

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