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## **Argentina: Human rights defenders seeking truth and justice for crimes against humanity committed during dictatorship threatened and harassed**

Human rights defenders seeking truth and justice for crimes against humanity committed during the Argentinian military dictatorship have received threats and have been the subject of harassment and break-ins in the last month.

On 13 August 2016, six unknown men broke into the house of human rights lawyer Ms **Laura Figueroa** in Tucuman and destroyed her belongings without taking any valuables. The break in took place whilst the lawyer attended a ceremony where the remains of an activist forcefully disappeared during the dictatorship were returned to his family. [Laura Figueroa](#) is the legal representative of the **Association of Relatives of the Disappeared in Tucuman** (Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos de Tucumán) and works with relatives of the disappeared who had been held in the clandestine detention centre "Pozo de Vargas". This is the third break-in Laura Figueroa has experienced since she begun seeking justice for the disappeared, fourteen years ago.

On the same day, two human rights defenders from Catamarca, acting as witnesses in cases of crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship, were intimidated. One received repeated threatening calls to her mobile phone, while the other was followed by an unknown vehicle from her house to the place where she met relatives of the disappeared to commemorate their passing. The human rights defenders' names have not been published for security reasons.

On 3 August 2016, human rights lawyer Mr **César Sivo** attended a court hearing in the case of Mr Gustavo Modesto Demarchi. The proceedings against the accused for crimes against humanity were initiated based on a complaint brought by the human rights defender. The charges are related to his alleged involvement in leading a paramilitary group responsible for forced disappearances and assassinations of dissidents during the dictatorship. Demarchi, a former federal prosecutor who remains an influential figure in local affairs, declared in court that those who brought charges against him "would have problems". Previously, in July 2016, a person who identified himself as Demarchi's lawyer contacted a friend of [César Sivo](#) to give the human rights defender a message that "he should start to worry". These threats are the latest in the midst of an ongoing smear campaign against César Sivo, led primarily by the news chain "Noticias y Protagonistas", that has [published](#) pictures of the human rights defender's home with his address – which has given rise to fears that he may be attacked. In the past, smear campaigns, threats and attacks have intensified at key moments of trials for crimes against humanity in which César Sivo played a key role. Close relatives of the human rights defender have been harassed through social media and unknown individuals twice broke into, raided and took confidential information from his wife's legal office.

Between 1976 and 1983, a series of repressive military juntas ruled over Argentina resulting in the disappearance of over 30,000 people with university students, union leaders, political dissidents and

human rights defenders most heavily targeted. A key moment for truth and justice came in June 2005, when the Supreme Court of Justice declared that the two main laws that prevented prosecutions for crimes committed during the dictatorship were unconstitutional. Human rights defenders, along with associations of survivors and relatives of victims, have since led the way in the pursuit of truth and justice.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the attacks and threats against human rights defenders Laura Figueroa and César Sivo and their relatives, which it believes to be directly linked to their legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders expresses additional concern over the pattern of threats and harassment against human rights defenders involved in truth seeking and prosecutions for crimes against humanity in Argentina.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Argentina to:**

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the acts of intimidation against **Laura Figueroa, César Sivo and their relatives**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of **Laura Figueroa and César Sivo**, in consultation with the defenders, as well as of the members of their family;
3. Ensure that all human rights defenders in **Argentina** seeking truth and justice in cases of crimes against humanity are able to exercise their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals.