

PARAGUAY

Investigation at a Neuropsychiatric Hospital

On August 29, 1994 the Union of Neuropsychiatric Hospital Workers (SI.TRA.H.N.) petitioned the Paraguayan State Prosecutors Office to intervene and investigate serious irregularities at the hospital. On the basis of these allegations, the court began a judicial investigation of the possibility that patients had died at the hospital under suspicious circumstances.

At the request of Dr. Luis Escobar Faella, chief of the General State Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía General del Estado), an EAAF member travelled to Paraguay between November 22 and 26, 1994 to assist in this investigation.

Introduction

The Neuropsychiatric Hospital is located in Asunción, Paraguay's capital city. It is a university hospital, and operates under the direction of the School of Medicine at the National University in Asunción. On average, 300 chronic patients are interned there at any one time.

On April 8, 1994, the SI.TRA.H.N. workers presented a deposition to the Council of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (Consejo Directivo de la Facultad de Ciencias Medicas). The deposition listed a number of suspicious procedural irregularities allegedly occurring at the hospital, including: "the lack of register of patients' deaths, the absence of death certificates, irregularities related with the destination of the corpses, the lack of autopsies, systematic electroshock practices, illegal burial of patients and others irregularities."¹ The Faculty of Medicine accordingly decide to intervene and take over direct management of the Neuropsychiatric Hospital.

On August 29, SI.TRA.H.N. petitioned the

State Prosecutor's Office to intervene and investigate these serious irregularities. The court began a judicial investigation based on the workers' allegations that patients at the hospital had died under suspicious circumstances. Investigators compiled a list of the names of people thought to be buried without proper documentation on the hospital grounds. Some of the names on this list were similar to those on another list of people who disappeared during Gen. Stroessner's rule. This second list had been found on December 22, 1992 at the offices of the Asunción police, together with other documents in a file that came to be known as the "Archive of Horror." As a result of the possible connection between the irregularities at the hospital and the fate of disappeared persons, the General Prosecutors Office decided to act, and the case was reported extensively in the local press.

An association between psychiatric hospitals and the fate of political detainees and disappeared people had been long suspected.

On October 6, 1994 the judiciary conducted excavations in the hospital grounds at five sites marked by witnesses. These excavations were done by non-trained personnel, who did not use appropriate methodologies.

The Role of EAAF

EAAF has collaborated several times already with the Paraguayan Judiciary since 1993, when the country returned to democracy. EAAF has also traveled to Paraguay at the request of the Church Emergency Aid Committee (Comite de Iglesias de Ayuda de Emergencia), which requested our participation in several forensic investigations.

This time, at the request of Dr. Luis Escobar Faella, chief of the General State Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía General del Estado), EAAF member Alejandro worked in Paraguay between November 22 to 26, 1994.

The EAAF representative compared the names

1. 1994 Judicial File, entitled "Denunciation made by the Union of Workers at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital and sent to the State Prosecutor's Office against the director of the Neuropsychiatric Hospital about dubious deaths of patients," Asunción, *Juzgado de 1ra Instancia en lo Criminal de Bvo. Turno. Juez: Dr. Jorge Gonzalez R. Secretaria 15 a cargo del Dr. Marcial J. Bellotto.*

and clinical histories of persons listed in the hospital records with 700 names from the "archive of horrors" list of disappeared people. By comparing ages, sex, place of origin, and last names, it was established that although there were similarities in some cases, these were coincidental. Thus, the possibility that disappeared people were buried in the registered graves at the neuropsychiatric hospital was ruled out.

Inchaurregui examined the remains recovered during the excavations and established that only the ones exhumed from one of the five sites were human. These remains were incomplete and belonged to a female individual, 155 cm tall, and aged 65 years or more at death. The cause of death was not determined. Significantly, the disappeared people on the list from the "archives of horror" were all male. Therefore, there was no point in using the list to identify the remains.

EAAF inspected the area of the neuropsychiatric compound where more graves were supposedly located and presented a working plan to the judicial officials for a future mission. The mission would focus on exhuming the other burial sites that may contain human remains and analysing the findings.

Update

Dr. Faella was removed from his post when the composition of the Paraguayan Supreme Court changed. As the possibility of finding victims of state terrorism buried at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital seemed unlikely, the case no longer attracted much attention or interest, and EAAF's excavation plan was never realized.