

AMR 45

Translation of a letter from prisoners in the 7th Police station, Asuncion.

Sr. Comisario de la Comisaría Seccional Séptima
Inspector Principal Don Osvaldo Arcadio Rojas, E.S.D.

Asuncion, 20.2.1973

Exercising the right of petition, we, political prisoners in your charge, kept without the trial required by law, address ourselves to you as immediately responsible for the norms in vigour in this prison. We demand the abolition of those measures which deprive us of inalienable individual rights and keep up conditions prejudicial to our health, contrary to expressed legal provisions.

The struggle for the effective operation of civil rights is not only a pressing need, but a right which dignity and honesty demand should not be given up. We hope that you agree, and that you will take this letter as a contribution towards the faithful carrying-out of your duties, originating in law No.309 which demand that the police "should carry out their functions within the legal limits and with due respect to the human personality and its inalienable rights".

1) Among the things to which we particularly object is the system of visits. The twenty minutes per week allowed on working days is very short and inadequate for our families who work. It is no more than a subterfuge to hide the effective state of incommunication in which we are kept. The prior authorisation limited to people determined by yourself - which limits visits to only very close relations- the interrogation of all those who arrive (even if only to enquire after our wellbeing), the officials or head staff placed to listen to our conversations with our families- all these are methods of intimidation which limit our rights to protect our intimacy and free communication. Finally, the frequent denials of access for visitors are unjustified, as is the way in which members of our families, even when they have come long distances, are turned away because they are not carrying the identification document with for years now they have been showing the personnel on guard.

It is obvious that the only aim of such irregularities is to dishearten and intimidate our long-suffering and self-sacrificing mothers, wives, sisters, children and friends, in an attempt not only to weaken but also to break those affective links which unite family and friends, surrounding us with a sensation of abandon and solitude which drowns us in a constant feeling of anxiety and prostration. These emotions have the gravest consequences, which end by causing psycho-physical harm. This constitutes a premeditated and treacherous attempt not only on our morale and on our physical state, but also on those of our families. Examples of these disruptive consequences are not lacking among the families of our political prisoners. It is the most cruel and inhuman expression of those psychological tortures expressly forbidden by the National Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and condemned by all the honest consciences of the country.

2) Unjustifiable too are the measures which directly affect our health. Although it is true that the institution includes medical aid (Dr. Franco) an odontologist (Dr. Ana Ochoa) and a nurse, a network of unfounded restrictions and prohibitions prevents the sick from receiving adequate treatment. We have never received odontological attention, except for occasional extractions obtained after interminable negotiations. We have no access to the medical unit. We have not succeeded in getting even one injection, not that patients under treatment should have control checks, a normal job for medical assistants. The many years of prison spent in a naturally aggressive medium, which keeps us under the pressure of constant emotional tensions, render necessary the attention of a psychiatrist to treat the nervous ailments from which the majority of us suffer.

It is sought to weaken faith in these attributes, and to make our country used to a situation in which obsequiousness, submission, corruption and arrogance are normal. But this country's character, its moral and spiritual energy have been forged in the fight precisely against those who, from inside or out, have tried to nullify or halt its process of perfectionment. Its unbroken will is shown today by political, religious and cultural bodies, by trade unions, by students organisations and by social personalities most representative of the citizenry who, with an ever greater force, demand the creation of a State of Law which will put an end- amongst other things- to the injustice of keeping honest citizens indefinitely under lock and key without being charged with an offence and deprived of all rights.

Sir, it is true that the possibility of making good the monstrous injustice by which we are imprisoned does not lie in your hands. Nor are we unaware of the fear you must feel at the absence of guarantees where no one can feel safe. But we understand that it does fall within your competence to correct the present unjust and illegal arrangements, substituting for them others which will guarantee

A) free communication with parents and friends (a) by abolishing prior authorisations for visitors, listening-in to conversations and interrogation of our visitors; (b) by extending the length of the time for visits to four hours per week on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays; (c) by consideration for members of our families known to the staff when they forget to bring their documents.

B) Conditions and possibilities favourable to health (a) by removing the obstacles to adequate attention of the sick, and by the presence of specialists for illnesses concerning sight, nerves, heart, respiratory organs and other conditions requiring surgery; (b) by the provision of recreation in the open air for at least one hour a day, and at appropriate hours; (c) by fixing the timetable for the cells to be shut from 8 pm to 6 am.

C) Improved food, by the addition of greenstuffs and sufficient meat to the meal, alternating stew and beans with another type of beans or rice, even if only twice a week. Responsibility for preparing the meals to be given to someone in full possession of his mental faculties.

D) Free access to the reading material in legal circulation in the country, with the suppression of the prohibition on reading daily newspapers and of the indefinite retention of material.

We trust our requests will meet with favourable attention.

Yours very truly,

(Letter signed by

- 1) Antolin Cardozo (13 years of prison)
- 2) Marciano Villagra (10 years of prison)
- 3) Cristobal Valenzuela (10 years)
- 4) Justo Anibal Garcete (9 years)
- 5) Ing. Virigilio Bareiro (9 years)
- 6) Bernardo Cardozo (9 years)
- 7) Luis Gonzaga Gimenez (8 years)
- 8) Calixto Ramirez (8 years)
- 9) Herminio Ramon Ramirez (8 years)
- 10) Rogelio Mora (4 years of prison)
- 11) Anastasio Martinez (4 years of prison)