

Argentina Police Archives Made Public

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina - Argentine police infiltrated unions and dissident groups before and during the 1976-83 military dictatorship, monitoring tens of thousands of people for a quarter of a century, newly released police documents show.

The archives contain data about police espionage and human rights abuses that were previously unavailable, said Alesandra Corea, a spokeswoman for the Commission for Memory, an independent human rights group that is overseeing the preservation of the records.

The archives of police intelligence were first discovered in 1998 behind a wall in a building that now houses the Commission for Memory.

"There is tremendous historical value here and it could aid prosecutors who are trying to bring some former Dirty War figures to justice," said Mariana Amieva, a librarian with the group.

Files compiled by Buenos Aires police between 1957 and 1983 followed the movements of more than 250,000 people, the documents indicated.

They show police conducted surveillance of labor meetings and even private social events, according to human rights groups who are cataloguing 3.5 million pages of information they obtained.

Many of the files regarding the military dictatorship are awaiting review by judicial authorities, Corea said, and are being held in a courthouse in the city of La Plata, 35 miles southeast of Buenos Aires.

Human rights activists said the documents show police frequently classified Argentines based on their enrollment in a university, union membership and religious or political affiliation in a series of lists.

Officers also created categories for what it called subversive "delinquents," according to human rights activists.

Human rights groups said the release of the archives was a step toward airing the full truth about Argentina's

military dictatorship.

At least 9,000 people disappeared during the dictatorship, though human rights groups estimate the number around 30,000. Those who opposed the government were kidnapped, tortured and often executed.

Flora Marian de Sersorvendino of the human rights group Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo said she believed the documents shed new light on the police's role during the so-called Dirty War.

The documents' release came as Argentines are re-examining the junta years. Prosecutors have said the time was marked by a systematic crackdown on political dissent.

In August, new President Nestor Kirchner backed lawmakers in Congress who repealed two amnesty laws dating to the 1980s. The laws had granted immunity to those suspected of atrocities during the dictatorship.

Since then, numerous former military officials and police have been detained. As many as 1,300 current and former military officers could eventually face trial, according to human rights groups.

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