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EXTERNAL

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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
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ENGLAND

Abridged Version of Taped
Testimony of Washington Perez
(SWEDEN, August 1976)

I arrived on 13/14 August 1976 having left Argentina for this country (Sweden). I and my family had left Uruguay for Argentina 2 1/2 years ago, and we were living in Moron, Province of Buenos Aires.

On 13 June about 4.00 to 4.15 am people burst violently into my house demanding whether Washington Perez lived there. We found ourselves confronted with a group of eight heavily armed people. They identified themselves as Uruguayans and Argentinians. They said they had someone they wanted me to see and that there was nothing against me in Argentina as I was working and living in the country with my family in complete legality. One of them said to me "Look Perro, be quiet because there are no problems, you know me and you know some people who are here". My sons said that one of them should be allowed to accompany me, to which they agreed.

We drove for 20 or 25 minutes. During the journey they communicated by radio with people at some headquarters telling them how far away they were and how long they would take to get there.

We arrived, a metal door was raised and we drove into what appeared to be a garage, because of the light I could see other cars and vans - it was very cold. I was taken out of the car and made to climb some stairs initially made of cement but later of wood. I went through a door which was then closed and the scarf covering my eyes was removed.

I found myself with the same group of men who had been to my house and some others whom I had not seen before. When I entered the room I identified the man who had spoken to me at my home with absolute certainty as a commissar of the Uruguayan police intelligence, Commissar Campos Hermida - I knew him from the time I was arrested in Uruguay. With him was someone they called chief and colonel, also a Uruguayan. I was also able to identify the brother of Colonel Barrios who is commander of the Libertad

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Prison. There was also a captain in the Uruguayan police intelligence a police investigator whose name I am uncertain about. There was also an Argentinian colonel.* He told me I had been picked because I was not politically involved. They said there were only routine problems in Uruguay and that I would be able to return there in two or three months.

The Argentine colonel then said: "Look . . . we have a friend of yours whom we want you to speak to - fortunately we managed to snatch this person from a place where he had been detained. We don't want to blame others, but he had been detained by the Argentine Federal Police, during the time he was there. . ." What a tremendous shock when comrade Gatti appeared. I had known him since 1952. Gatti was active in the Uruguayan Students' Federation, he was also a founder of the Convencion Nacional de Trabajadores of Uruguay and a member of Resistencia Obrera Estudiantil. I embraced Gatti and saw that his left arm was badly infected and his whole arm was inflamed. Gatti told me that it had not been his idea to involve me in this, and that he had been detained for four or five days. (Gatti was abducted on 10 June)

The Argentinian colonel said: "Well Gatti, we are going to make a concrete suggestion to Don Ferro. We want a sum of money for Gatti - a big sum of money." They also proposed to release some 10 comrades detained in Uruguay. Gatti's eyes were very inflamed and he sat down with great difficulty. They left us alone so that Gatti could explain to me whom I should contact. Gerardo and I both felt that this group of individuals was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Senators Michelini and Gutierrez Ruiz in Argentina as they had used an expression when talking to us about hurrying up the negotiations that had been used when Michelini was taken from his home "your time is up" (llego la hora).

* (He deduced this because of his uniform, Argentinian accent and because he was addressed as colonel by the others.)

The Uruguayan promised that I would not be followed. They warned me to make contact as quickly as possible for Gatti's and my own safety. They then referred to a meal I had recently had at Flores railway station. Campos Hermida boasted: "Look we could have gone to another country in Latin America or Europe but we chose you as intermediary".

They repeated that they would now accompany me and drop me near my home. Before leaving they took me to another room, that is to the same room where they had first taken me. One of them said, "We repeat what we have already said today; don't go to anyone but the designated contact; we aren't interested in who it is, but that you find him as soon as possible." While this person was talking another Argentinian colonel opened a strong box containing large sums of Argentinian and Uruguayan money together with passports and Argentinian identity cards. They said they would give me a certain amount of money if they had to, but I didn't believe them at all. They also said there would be no problem in my going to another country once my role as intermediary was over. They added, "We repeat that you try to do this as quickly as possible because we know there are ways in which the friends of Gatti can obtain through unions and solidarity organizations in Europe, the money that we want."

I was then driven with my son to the Ramos Mejia railway station where they left us.

On Tuesday, I managed to contact a friend of Gatti, and outlined the proposal made. The ransom in exchange for the release of 10 comrades in Uruguay, and the release of Gatti via an embassy. I told them speed was essential. Gatti's friends distrusted the "gang".

Later that week the comrades told me where to collect an envelope containing the reply to the abductors. That same night the "gang" called me only 20 minutes or so after I had collected the packet to say they were coming to fetch me. I was picked up by a Ford Falcon or Torino (police use this type of car without registration plates). I was taken hooded to the same place again. They mentioned that they were a Nazi fascist group and there was a framed picture of Hitler on the wall.

The gang reacted furiously to the comrades' demands that they have a note written in Gatti's own hand and guarantees about his physical and mental health. I was taken to see Gatti who was in bed, his arm was less inflamed and he had been to see a surgeon. One of the men, a policeman, joked and said that he had been to the Campo de Mayo (the largest military barracks in the Province of Buenos Aires). This caused much

anger among the captors. Gatti was recovering a little but he told me that he had been hung for he didn't know how long and badly tortured. He had been hung with his arms above his head and the handcuffs had cut into his left arm.

Then the officials reappeared with a photographer who took a shot of Gatti in bed showing his arm and me holding a copy of that day's La Tarde (29-30 June) which I had brought. I was instructed to hand the photo over to Gatti's comrades. On this occasion I was not allowed to speak with Gatti alone. They warned me to speed up the negotiations because the gang was getting nervous. Perez made contact once more with the comrades and was then collected by the gang. A week must have elapsed. This time when they picked me up the second car which was a support vehicle could not be seen, they did a U-turn to see what had happened to them. The support car had been intercepted by the Argentinian plain-clothes police. I could see all this through the car back window. I saw the Colonel take out a document - he was holding a weapon - after a minute's discussion he returned to the car and said everything was alright. I was then taken again to the same place, I saw Gatti who said he was getting better. He said he was worried about me and said "what a terrible job you have". The gang opened the note from the comrades and exclaimed "these people are messing us around too much. They're just pulling our legs, they want nude photos (front and profile) and tapes. That's too much. Yes we are going to wipe them out. The time has come."

I was sent away with yet another message for the comrades. I was also given later a handwritten letter from Gatti outlining the proposal that he be released through an embassy. Unfortunately I was unable to make contact with the comrades. On about 17 July the "gang" collected me again. They came to get me from the kiosk where I sold newspapers. They were in a more serious mood this time. One of them held a machine gun and another a large rifle and motioned me to get in the car. There was a police car nearby about 40-50 metres from the corner but the gang could stand there in plain view with their weapons without having problems.

I was taken to the same place. They asked if I had made contact. I had to say no. One then said "Well give it back to me, its all over now." I asked what he meant but he just took back the letter and tore it up, saying "the Gatti business is over". I asked to see Gatti but they told me I couldn't, that I was only the mediator. They told me aggress-

ively not to mention Gatti again.

They told me there was a person they wanted to see. There were more of them than before that night. Some people appeared to have just come from Uruguay, both police and military. Someone came in a few minutes later. If I had been scared the first time I had seen Gatti you can imagine what I felt when I saw someone appear with his hands tied with a long rope, his head covered with a white scarf, like a mummy. They removed the scarf and I saw Leon Duarte, prominent Uruguayan trade unionist, founding member of the Convencion Nacional de los Trabajadores, a member of Resistencia Obrera Estudiantil and a personal friend. He stood in a battered jacket and a dirty shirt and had clear signs of torture. He was barefoot and his feet were completely white. He had obviously been standing a long time in some cold place, he was in a very ill-used state.

We embraced. I asked Duarte what they had meant by "the Gatti business was finished" but I don't think he realised that he was in the same place as Gatti. I asked him "When did they take you?" The "gang" told me to restrict myself to listening. Leon answered me all the same. "They took me from La Rioja St. about four or five days ago." (Duarte was abducted on 13 July). "For four days I haven't eaten anything but a slice of bread and a glass of water". He had clearly been brutally tortured. Memories of all this come to me continually, 24 hours a day. If I had only been able to help . . . It seemed I was still to be the intermediary. I asked them again what had happened to Gatti. They told me to be quiet and listen to Leon Duarte. He said "Look, Perro" (we called each other by our nicknames Perro and Loco, we had been friends for 24 years). "The fact is that if you accept to be intermediary these people are suggesting that we can obtain a large sum of money. These people want money, they want dollars, many dollars. I don't know how we can do this but you must take the proposal to the comrades. But it's up to you if you want to continue being the intermediary or not." What alternative did I have? The Argentinian jumped up and said that I had to accept. One of them said angrily that Duarte should be given food and shoes. "I am going for a pair of shoes, there are forty pairs of shoes below. It was clear that not only Gatti was or had been there and Duarte but the 26 others who had fallen into their hands. I don't know if it was just an expression but the fact of there being forty pairs of shoes was an indication that there were many more people there. I said goodbye to

Duarte, afraid that they would continue torturing him.

Before leaving the gang said to my question about Gatte "No, no Don Perro, don't ask any more". They dropped me off at Liniers and I went to my home in Moron. It was about 1 a.m. or later. My family were worried and we then began to discuss getting help for asylum through the UNHCR or something similar.

A few days later a comrade and member of ROE called me who warned me that time was running out. "Stay calm but go away."

(After the sudden end of negotiations with the "gang" Perez remained only another 15 days in Argentina under the protection of the UNHCR, and finally found asylum in Sweden.)