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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Mrs. Lidia Ester CABRERA de Franco
Mr. Victor Bonilla-Sosa, Political Officer

DATE: July 21, 1978

DECONTROL

PLACE: US Embassy-Asuncion

SUBJECT: Released Political Prisoner Interview

DISTRIBUTION: AMB, DCM, POL, POL/R
ARA/ECA, ARA:GLister, D/HA, INR/RAR

Mrs. Cabrera de Franco requested to speak to the Political Officer in order to convey her gratitude for the assistance the Embassy had given her release. She was released July 14, 1978 from Emboscada prison. She felt that without a doubt, pressure brought to bear upon the Paraguayan government through President Carter's human rights policy had benefited her and many others. Mrs. de Franco was accompanied by her two young daughters. The rest of the interview was devoted to details about her arrest and subsequent questioning and incarceration.

Mrs. Cabrera de Franco did not have a clear idea why she had been picked up by the police. She had been living with her husband in Puerto Yguazu, Misiones, Argentina for a number of years. Her mother is Paraguayan and her father Argentine. Her husband, she said, had been exiled from Paraguay since 1965 for alleged subversive activities, but she stated she had not know her husband until they met in Argentina. She denied categorically any political involvement, and much less any subversive political activities.

Mrs. de Franco said she was picked up with her husband and daughter on January 18, 1977 in their home in Argentina. The house was thoroughly searched. They were neither told the reason for their detention by arresting Argentine police officers, nor told where they were being taken. They were all bound, gagged and blindfolded and thrown into a clos truck. For the next four days they were kept in this condition, only with a few stops along the way. NO FOOD OR WATER WAS GIVEN TO THEM.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S20000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RFS/TPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
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-2-

She surmised that they were being taken across the river to the Paraguayan side. Once there, on the fifth day, their blindfolds were taken off along with their gags. Eventually they were taken to the Investigations Police headquarters in Asuncion. From the time they were first detained by the Argentine authorities until one year later, the Francos had no news about their daughter nor whether she was being taken care of by the authorities. When they arrived in Investigaciones, they were brutally beaten and kicked. Mrs. de Franco's husband was kept in a separate floor (above where the female prisoners are kept) but she could see him in the distance and realized he was being tortured. Mrs. de Franco said that one of the greatest hardships in the Investigaciones jail is the daily witnessing of brutality. She says that though prisoners undergoing torture are taken off to another private place in the building, because of the small size of the local, the cries and shouts of those being tortured can be heard over the radio noise and furniture moving that takes place when they are "working someone over." In addition, after a "session" the prisoner is thrown into the cell with other detainees. This is usually done accompanied by continual beatings and kicking of the tortured prisoner. Talking of any kind with any one other than the jailers is forbidden and brutally punished. Mrs. de Franco said she was severely beaten and kicked for no reason. She was told to confess to committing subversive activities and told to sign a confession which she refused. After many such fruitless attempts, she was left to herself (always sharing a cell with other prisoners). Mrs. de Franco states she saw Gladys Ramirez in Investigaciones on January 23, 1978. She also stated that both Mr. Cantero, the political chief, of Investigaciones (see Domingo Laino case) and the Chief of Investigaciones, Pastor Coronel take a personal part in the interrogations and the application of the tortures. She said that Cantero interrogated her and her husband and that he threatened continually to kill her if she didn't confess.

After approximately one year, she saw her mother who had been looking for her during that time. It was due to the kindness of one of the jailers, a Mr. Juan P., that the mother found out her daughter's whereabouts. When this was later discovered by Coronel, the officer was removed. When the Red Cross International made an inspection in December 1977, Mrs. de Franco was transferred to Emboscada without any explanations. She was allowed to have her daughter live with her at

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

ENCLOSURE 1

-3-

the Emboscada prison, but after a while sent her back to her mother because of the bad influence exerted on the child by the conditions of the prison. (Emboscada is the prison reserved for political detainees near Asuncion.) Mrs. de Franco said that the police keep two lists of prisoners, one they allow outsiders to see and another with the names of the other prisoners being held that the authorities disclaim any knowledge about. She said that her name and that of a Juan Rolon (OPM suspect) were on the latter list.

Mrs. de Franco claims that when President Videla made a visit to Paraguay in May of 1977, several prisoners were turned over to the Argentine authorities that came with the President's airplane. She gave the following names: Marta Landi and her husband Alejandro Landi, Jose Neel and two Uruguayans. She stated that she overheard the Argentine authorities talking about "now being able to get rid" of these people. She added that these persons were never heard from again.

Mrs. de Franco talking about other detainees, stated that a Juan Jose Penayo and a Mr. Vera Baez (did not remember first name) were brought in also from Misiones and treated like animals, uncared for after they became ill from the tortures. She herself said that her own teeth and arms hurt from lack of calcium in the diet. Dr. Bogado Gondra, himself a prisoner in Emboscada cared for her and told her she had vitamin deficiency and neuritis as a result of her imprisonment. She added that another prisoner, Otto Gunther was so brutally tortured that he almost died at the hands of Pastor Coronel's inhuman treatment. Before she was finally taken to Emboscada, Mrs. de Franco recalls one of the jailers telling her cynically, "You're lucky they are sending you to Emboscada," in reference to several prisoners that disappeared after police claimed that they had "escaped." She was forced to sign an indagatoria stating she was a communist.

Mrs. de Franco said her husband is still in jail and that she has no idea when if ever he will be released alive. The Inter-Faith Church Committee in Asuncion has been providing her and her children with some relief until she can find a job. Needless to say, her personal identity documents, a sine qua non for obtaining a job or travelling, have not been returned. In this regard, as in many other cases of released political prisoners, Mrs. de Franco shares a common lot of uncertainty and constant fear.

POL:VBonilla-Sosa:mkn 7/25/78

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