



25 years after the fall of Alfredo Stroessner "Justice. The great debt of Paraguay's democracy"

Alfredo Stroessner had been in power for thirty-five years when he was deposed on the 3rd of February 1989. 25 years after his fall, the brutal crimes of the dictatorship in Paraguay still remain unpunished. "Justice is the great debt of Paraguay's democracy," says Dr. Martín Almada, Paraguayan lawyer and educator, uncoverer of the Operation Condor's "Archives of Terror", founder of "The Museum of Memories" in Asunción and Laureate of the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize").

"For 25 years we have been struggling to build a true democracy. A time of great advances, but also of continuing challenges," reflects Martín Almada at this year's anniversary of Alfredo Stroessner's fall in Paraguay.

Between 1954 and 1989, Paraguay experienced the longest military dictatorship of the Southern Cone. "100,000 people have been victims of 'Operation Condor', a criminal pact that coordinated the repression actions of the military dictatorships in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay in the 1970s, against political and ideological opponents", recalls the Paraguayan lawyer and educator. "Stroessner is gone, but many people who benefited from the dictatorship are still in power. That is the reason why there is no justice for the crimes committed at that time."

In May 1989, Almada took his own case of imprisonment and the murder of his wife to court. However, the Attorney General's Office did not comply with his request. In 2013, Paraguayan survivors, excited about the progress of Argentina in investigating crimes against humanity, using of the principle of "universal jurisdiction", brought Almada's case before an Argentine court. The judge hearing the case urged the Paraguayan justice system to respond.

25 years of achievements and struggles

"From 1989 to this moment we have taken leaps," admits Almada. He elaborates: "The enactment of the 1992 Constitution incorporates Hábeas Data, who allowed an investigation supported by Judge José Agustín Fernández and led us to the 'Archives of Terror'. The discovery of those documents, categorized since 2009 by UNESCO as 'Memory of the World', available for public inspection in the Asuncion Palace Courts, is tremendously important." Through uncovering these documents, Paraguay has contributed to the advancement of trials against genocide in progress in other countries, providing evidence to judges from France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Chile and Uruguay.

The opening of the 'Museum of Memories' in the former detention center known as 'La Técnica' and recent incorporation of these stories in history lessons within schools are other important achievements mentioned by Martín Almada. "It is also important to highlight the work of the Commission for Truth and Justice in the investigation of the crimes of the dictatorship. This worked between 2004 and 2008, concluding with a report that gathers the testimony of thousands of victims on violations of human rights during the Stroessner regime. It was a citizen initiative channeled by

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the 'Mesa Historical Memory' team and it was supported by international human rights organizations, critical in strengthening democracy."

Martin points out that some of the outstanding issues that remain include "the failure to punish the guilty ones (and ...) a climate of impunity and corruption that creates more injustice. It is necessary for the state to recover the assets appropriated by dictators and for it to use the recovered funds to compensate the victims. The murderers of the dictatorship should be punished, but also the democracy's officials for not doing their duty. The curricula of the military and police schools are another pending matter, according to Almada. "They are still trained to monitor, torture and kill. At our police stations, torture is still being practiced. There is where human rights education should be included. This should happen in universities, too. Lawyers, judges and prosecutors never demonstrated against the dictatorship. That is troubling, as there is no consciousness of our tragic past."

However, the fundamental question that remains unsolved according to Almada is "the right of rural people to access land. The Agrarian reform, enshrined in the National Constitution, remains elusive to the poor. Instead, the arms industry development and extensive farming are scandalous - these estates are often owned by foreigners and being subjected to constant use of pesticides, destruction of forests with unthinkable consequences for the country's greatest wealth : the Guarani aquifer."

Who is Martin Almada?

Martín Almada (77) is a Paraguayan lawyer and educator. The Military intelligence Condor classified his dissertation, entitled "Paraguay : Education and Dependence", as "subversive". Considered an "intellectual terrorist", he was kidnapped in 1974 and tortured during the three years of his confinement. During his captivity, his wife, Celestina Pérez, an educator, died due to psychological torture. The military was calling her by phone to make her listen to the screams of her husband while he was being tortured. They were sending her his bloodied clothes and they even assured her that 'the subversive master' had died. She died of a heart attack. He was told that Celestina had committed suicide.

Due to international pressure, Almada was released in 1977 and granted asylum in Panama. He was then recruited by UNESCO in Paris, where he lived in exile together with his three children. Upon returning to Paraguay, once democracy was restored, he requested to see his criminal record. The government replied that there was none, and they denied that he has ever been deprived of his liberty.

On December 22, 1992, he found the so-called "Terror Files", three tons of military documentation on the Condor Plan. Together with his second wife, the Argentinian journalist and educator María Stella Cáceres, and a group of collaborators, he created the Celestina Pérez de Almada Foundation. And where the government once operated a detention and torture center, Almada and his team founded the "Museum of Memory", a key institution in the teaching of Paraguay's recent history.

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For his courage in defending human rights and seeking justice against torturers, Martín Almada was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 2002. The distinction, also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize", was presented in the Swedish Parliament during the 10th anniversary of the discovery of the "Archives of Terror."

The recognition was crucial to Almada: "In Paraguay, my head was worth \$50 or \$100, at most. I am very cheap. But from the moment I received the Alternative Nobel Prize in 2002, the authorities began to look at me differently. The Right Livelihood Award has been very important in my life. This award represents very strong moral support. For example, the death threats I received by telephone have stopped. Ever since I received this award, I have much more support and recognition from the diplomatic corps."

For more information please visit

<http://www.rightlivelihood.org/almada.html>

A video portrait of Martín Almada is available at

http://www.rightlivelihood.org/almada_video.html

For high resolution video and pictures please refer to

http://download.rightlivelihood.org/files/Laureates_1980-2013_Media/2002%20-%20Almada/

Contact:

If you are interested in interviewing Martín Almada, please note that he speaks Spanish and French.

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