

10-10-2003

Argentine Police Fired for Corruption

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Argentine Police Fired for Corruption." (2003). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13194>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Argentine Police Fired for Corruption

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Argentina

Published: 2003-10-10

Argentina's two main police forces, the federal and the Buenos Aires provincial forces, lost their police chiefs because of corruption scandals. The dismissals were the latest anti-corruption efforts of President Nestor Kirchner, efforts that earlier led to an overhaul of the military leadership, other police firings, and the resignation under pressure of a justice of the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ).

Federal police chief Gen. Roberto Giacomino was removed from his post on Oct. 3. The Justice Ministry reported that an investigation had confirmed that Giacomino had awarded US\$700,000 in inflated contracts for computers in the Churrucá police hospital to companies with ties to his relatives. Also fired was Raul Pigretti, head of the police welfare department.

The Justice Ministry said the legal affairs office had warned Giacomino about irregularities in the concession of the contracts, but he not only proceeded to authorize them but did so with no public bidding process.

"The company awarded the contract for software (L&M Sist.Serv) belongs to Vicente Capizzi, the brother of Giacomino's brother-in-law," said Justice Minister Gustavo Beliz, "and the company that received the hardware contract (Novel Time) belongs to Santiago Alvarez, uncle of Elizabeth Monica Alvarez, daughter-in-law of the former chief."

Giacomino survived earlier purge

Giacomino, who had been named to the post by former President Aldo Rodríguez Saa (Dec. 23-29, 2001) during his one-week presidency, was kept on by President Eduardo Duhalde (2001-2003) and ratified in his job by Kirchner, partly because he had the backing of Buenos Aires mayor Anibal Ibarra. Giacomino, who was in France for an Interpol meeting when he was given the news, was the only top-ranking federal police official to survive the firings ordered by Kirchner in June, when 11 police commissioners were dismissed as part of a government effort to clamp down on corruption (see NotiSur, 2003-06-06).

That shake-up, carried out shortly after Kirchner took office in late May, also reached the leadership of the armed forces, where several commanders were retired who had been junior officers during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship and dirty war.

Beliz said that the action taken against Giacomino was meant to show the government's willingness to totally root out corruption and criminal activity in the police departments. He said "further changes in the Federal Police" would be forthcoming, and he indicated that most of the top tier in the force would be out. He said that he would ask the person named as the new police chief to make a sworn financial-disclosure statement before assuming the post.

Giacomino's deputy Eduardo Hector Prados was named to temporarily fill the top spot on the force, and, on Oct. 7, Kirchner named Prados to head the Federal Police. His promotion meant the retirement of three officers with more seniority, but Beliz said the three were not involved in any way in the charges against Giacomino or in the other cases of corruption in the force.

Beliz repeated the administration's commitment to the "policy of security, to transparency, to the fight against crime, and to the prevention of insecurity."

"It should be clear to the public that this government will not be an accomplice to these scoundrels," said Cabinet chief Alberto Fernandez, who added that "when corrupt officials are found, they must be removed immediately, and must not be allowed to continue to act."

Earlier firing in Buenos Aires provincial force

The Federal Police is the second-largest force in this country of 37 million inhabitants. It has 33,000 officers, most of whom are assigned to the capital. The Buenos Aires provincial police is the largest force, with more than 45,000 officers. The Buenos Aires provincial force lost its chief, Alberto Sobrado, in August, in another corruption scandal.

The Federal Police is the second-largest force in this country of 37 million inhabitants. It has 33,000 officers, most of whom are assigned to the capital. The Buenos Aires provincial police is the largest force, with more than 45,000 officers. The Buenos Aires provincial force lost its chief, Alberto Sobrado, in August, in another corruption scandal.

The Buenos Aires provincial government asked Sobrado to resign after the Argentine magazine *Veintitres* reported that he had deposited US\$330,000 in a bank account in the Bahamas. Sobrado said he had inherited the money, but he was accused of tax evasion and illicit enrichment. Amid the increased crime and the police-corruption scandal, the provincial government has ordered that the financial-disclosure reports of 135 police officials be investigated to ascertain whether their declared assets are in line with their incomes.

The Buenos Aires provincial government asked Sobrado to resign after the Argentine magazine Veintitres reported that he had deposited US \$330,000 in a bank account in the Bahamas. Sobrado said he had inherited the money, but he was accused of tax evasion and illicit enrichment. Amid the increased crime and the police-corruption scandal, the provincial government has ordered that the financial-disclosure reports of 135 police officials be investigated to ascertain whether their declared assets are in line with their incomes.

The internal affairs office has said it has discovered that some police officers have homes with heated swimming pools, luxury automobiles, boats, and other expensive items not affordable on their salaries.

The internal affairs office has said it has discovered that some police officers have homes with heated swimming pools, luxury automobiles, boats, and other expensive items not affordable on their salaries.

On Oct. 4, the Buenos Aires government dismissed two other police commissioners, secretary of the force Julio Cesar Frutos and director of operations coordination Hector Rodolfo Diaz. Both are being investigated for having assets not commensurate with their salaries. Their dismissals were announced 24 hours after Giacomino was fired. The command structures of both the Federal Police and the Buenos Aires provincial police are now on tenterhooks as the investigations continue. The provincial government has charged 24 officers with illicit enrichment, and it is carrying out ongoing investigations of accusations of torture, misuse of weapons, involvement in gambling rings, drugs, and prostitution, and complicity in extortion and kidnapping.

On Oct. 4, the Buenos Aires government dismissed two other police commissioners, secretary of the force Julio Cesar Frutos and director of operations coordination Hector Rodolfo Diaz. Both are being investigated for having assets not commensurate with their salaries. Their dismissals were announced 24 hours after Giacomino was fired. The command structures of both the Federal Police and the Buenos Aires provincial police are now on tenterhooks as the investigations continue. The provincial government has charged 24 officers with illicit enrichment, and it is carrying out ongoing investigations of accusations of torture, misuse of weapons, involvement in gambling rings, drugs, and prostitution, and complicity in extortion and kidnapping.

Police corruption not a new problem

Police corruption not a new problem

Sociologist Gustavo Palmieri, an expert on police affairs at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), said that corruption and human rights violations are the main "ills" that permeate the Argentine police forces. He said many police are involved in the same crimes they are supposed to be fighting. A number of police officers have been arrested and prosecuted for participating in kidnapping, prostitution, and gambling rackets. Police brutality is also a serious problem in Buenos Aires, say groups like the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Sociologist Gustavo Palmieri, an expert on police affairs at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), said that corruption and human rights violations are the main "ills" that permeate the Argentine police forces. He said many police are involved in the same crimes they are supposed to be fighting. A number of police officers have been arrested and prosecuted for participating in kidnapping, prostitution, and gambling rackets. Police brutality is also a serious problem in Buenos Aires, say groups like the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The Buenos Aires police internal affairs office said that 1,100 inquiries have been opened in the past year, including 257 cases of officers investigated for illicit enrichment and 124 for "unlawful coercion." Palmieri said Giacomino's quick dismissal was unprecedented, because in the past, top-ranking police officials accused of corruption have generally been kept in their posts, or belatedly dismissed on other pretexts.

The Buenos Aires police internal affairs office said that 1,100 inquiries have been opened in the past year, including 257 cases of officers investigated for illicit enrichment and 124 for "unlawful coercion." Palmieri said Giacomino's quick dismissal was unprecedented, because in the past, top-ranking police officials accused of corruption have generally been kept in their posts, or belatedly dismissed on other pretexts.

The need for effective police leadership is an important issue for Argentines today, as the continued economic crisis has been accompanied by a dramatic rise in crime in the last few years. Kidnappings for ransom, a previously rare phenomenon, rose from one every 36 hours to one every 24 hours in the past two months.

The need for effective police leadership is an important issue for Argentines today, as the continued economic crisis has been accompanied by a dramatic rise in crime in the last few years. Kidnappings for ransom, a previously rare phenomenon, rose from one every 36 hours to one every 24 hours in the past two months.

-- End --