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Argentine President On Pardons For Military Officers Accused Of Human Rights Abuses

by John Neagle

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On Sept. 30 in Rosario, during a ceremony marking the return of the body of a 19th century caudillo, President Carlos Menem said he will proclaim an amnesty for members of the armed forces linked to human rights abuses by the end of October. The president had been expected to issue a broad-based pardon on Saturday. However, Menem said that in previous statements he meant to say that a proclamation on pardons would be issued by the end of October, not September. Menem called on Argentines to put the country's "painful past" behind them. The ceremony took place in Rosario, 250 km. northeast of Buenos Aires, at a monument marking the spot the Argentine flag first flew in 1812. The body of Gen. Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877), had been buried in Southampton, England for over a century. The casket arrived aboard an air force plane from Paris, and was flown by helicopter to Rosario. Menem declared, "With the welcome for Rosas we bid farewell to the past." Next, the president said he was "willing to pay all the political costs...so that we can join hands, open our hearts and put resentments behind us." Human rights groups, some leftist political parties and a faction of Menem's Justicialista Party, launched a campaign Sept. 29 to obtain a million signatures opposing a presidential pardon for any of the generals, admirals and other officers imprisoned or facing trial on human rights violation charges during the 1976-83 military regimes. At least 8,900 people disappeared during the violence. Rosas, a wealthy landowner, headed the Federalist Party in 1828 when the United Provinces of the River Plate were attempting to organize into the country that would become Argentina. He was governor of Buenos Aires province from 1829 to 1831, and was asked by the legislature to return in 1835. He ruled with an iron hand until forced into exile in 1852. Later, he was condemned to death in absentia. Rosas is considered a hero by some nationalists and a tyrant by others often described as liberals. (Basic data from AP, DPA, 09/30/89)

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