



American Statistical Association

Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics

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August 9, 2012

The Honorable Jorge Argüello
Ambassador of Argentina to the United States of America
1600 New Hampshire Ave, NW
Embassy of the Argentine Republic
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

Thank you for the communication from your embassy to the American Statistical Association (ASA) on July 25 that included a statement prepared by INDEC.

As you requested, we distributed your cover letter and the INDEC document at the August 1 Joint Statistical Meetings session titled "Repression of Statistics and Statisticians by the Argentine Government: Recent Developments, the Human Rights Context, and International Responses." A copy of your letter and the INDEC statement also were posted on the ASA website (www.amstat.org).

We write to share with you the attached response by the ASA to the INDEC communication. It was prepared by members of the ASA Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights.

You will note in the ASA statement that we identify five specific concerns. Primary among them is the Argentine government's continuing mistreatment of individual statisticians, economists, and research organizations that are producing independent economic statistical data and estimates.

We take this opportunity to convey to you the ASA's commitment to work with the government of the Argentine Republic to resolve our concerns, as well as assurances of our continued good wishes.

Respectfully yours,

Handwritten signature of Ron Wasserstein.

Ron Wasserstein
Executive Director
American Statistical Association

Handwritten signature of William Seltzer.

William Seltzer
Chair, Committee on Scientific
Freedom and Human Rights
American Statistical Association

Response of the American Statistical Association to the statement of the Argentine Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), submitted to the ASA by the Embassy of the Argentine Republic, Washington, DC, on July 26

The American Statistical Association (ASA) welcomes the response—conveyed to us by the Embassy of the Argentine Republic in Washington, DC—of Argentina’s Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) to the concerns that prompted the recent session titled “Repression of Statistics and Statisticians by the Argentine Government” at the ASA’s Joint Statistical Meetings. As requested, copies of the Argentine government’s response were made available to attendees of this session and posted on the ASA website. We appreciate the willingness of the Argentine government to engage with us on these matters.

Our concerns are the following:

1. The wholesale replacement for apparent political reasons in 2007 of the professional staff at INDEC engaged in compiling the Consumer Price Index (CPI)
2. The evident degradation of accuracy and underestimation of inflation by INDEC that has occurred since 2007
3. The use of vague and largely unspecified methodologies for price collection and CPI estimation employed by INDEC since 2007
4. The fines levied and the threats of criminal sanctions made against statisticians, economists, and research organizations that have compiled and released private indices of inflation beginning in 2011 in response to public requests for reliable estimates of inflation
5. Attempts to suppress reporting by national and international media outlets about the continuing repressive measures levied by the Argentine government on statisticians and others actively compiling alternative inflation estimates

We note that the ASA is not alone in raising one or more of these concerns. The Argentine government’s actions directly related to these issues also have been questioned or criticized by such leading organizations as the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; International Monetary Fund; International Statistical Institute; and national statistical societies of France, Korea, and the United Kingdom. They also have been questioned or criticized by such well-respected international media outlets as *Bloomberg Business Week*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, as well by several Argentine newspapers.

The ASA deeply regrets the actions of the Argentine government with respect to all the points enumerated previously, but is particularly concerned about point four above: the targeting of Argentine statisticians and research organizations by the government. Under no circumstances can fines and threats of criminal sanctions for developing and presenting independent statistical data or estimates be justified.

The response of the Argentine government references a complaint made by the Chamber of Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Businesses of the Buenos Aires Central Market (chamber). In its complaint, the chamber charges that the release of inflation indices prepared by private consultants have “caused” lower consumption and led to losses on their part.

This attribution of cause makes little sense, since it is far more likely that the inflation experienced by consumers—rather than the release of privately prepared indices—caused whatever decrease in the demand for fruits and vegetables that may have occurred. The chamber’s claim led to fines levied against several companies and one individual, as stated in your letter.

INDEC also refers to the “confusion and uncertainty” that could be caused by what it considers “inaccurate” inflation estimates prepared by one of the private consulting firms. The ASA believes that “confusion and uncertainty” are inherent in every market economy—particularly when the confidence of users in official figures has been impaired—and that the publication of differing views is, in fact, a contribution toward helping market agents appreciate the real risks they face.

The INDEC statement continues by claiming, “The right to free speech and work cannot entail the endorsement of an irresponsible environment that leads to generating confusion and economic instability through the dissemination of inaccurate data and to causing damage to other segments of society.”

To the contrary, this view means that the right of free speech is restricted to the right to agree with the government. Without the right to be “wrong,” in the eyes of the government, there is no right to freedom of speech at all.

We hope the Argentine government will recognize the right of individuals and independent organizations to produce their own estimates and immediately rescind the fines and end the threats of criminal sanctions against individuals, organizations, and the press. Only then can the questions of appropriate methodology for computing the CPI and the extent of inflation in Argentina be debated in an atmosphere free of repression and intimidation.

Alexandria, Virginia
August 9, 2012