

International Coalition Urges United Nations To Protect Targeted Statisticians in Argentina

ALEXANDRIA, VA (PRWEB) OCTOBER 18, 2011 – A coalition of international statistical organizations has urged a United Nations Special Rapporteur to protect statisticians who have been the victims of escalating attacks by the Government of Argentina. The appeal to the Special Rapporteur, whose charge is the promotion and protection of the right of freedom of opinion and expression, was made in August by the American Statistical Association (ASA) in a letter signed by Executive Director Ron Wasserstein and William Seltzer, chair of the association's Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights. Since then, other statistical groups have supported the ASA appeal by writing letters of their own to the Special Rapporteur.

In late September, a letter of support was sent by Jean-Michel Poggie, the president of the Societe Francaise de Statistique. A second letter was written by Jae C. Lee, president of the International Statistical Institute. Earlier this month, Jong Hoo Choi, president of the Korean Statistical Society, also wrote, urging action to protect the targeted individuals in Argentina. Additional professional societies in other countries are expected to join this coalition in the coming weeks, according to Wasserstein and Seltzer.

The ASA letter expresses faith in the Special Rapporteur's ability to "use your good offices to safeguard those targeted from further harm." It continues: "We fear that, unless the Government is dissuaded from acting on the threats that they have so far made, considerable harm may befall a group of statisticians simply carrying out their work in accordance with the highest professional and ethical standards and that a great disservice will be done to civil society in Argentina."

All the letters express concern about the harassment of and punitive measures taken by Argentine authorities against statisticians and allied groups who have expressed their professional views and published alternative measurements of the consumer price index (CPI). Recent reports in the press have indicated that, in the long-running controversy over the accuracy of Argentina's inflation numbers, the Argentine government has recently issued subpoenas to various journalists and others in Argentina, including the local office of the International Monetary Fund, so they can be called as witnesses against their sources and consultants, in an effort to gather evidence against those private statisticians and research organizations compiling alternative CPI estimates using methods the government does not approve.

In its letter, the ASA states that "Since February 2011 the Government of Argentina has been systematically harassing and endeavoring to punish" a number of individual statisticians and research organizations that collect compile, and/or disseminate price statistics using the unapproved methods. The attacks, which first took the form of fines, "more recently have escalated to multiple fines and, reportedly, to threats of imprisonment under the criminal law."

According to the ASA letter, "In addition to the directly targeted statisticians and research organizations, the victims of these human rights violations include a wide range of users of statistics in Argentina and elsewhere (for example, researchers, the press, the business sector, and members of the general public), whose access to 'unapproved' inflation indicators and consumer price indices they prefer are being jeopardized. Moreover, with distortions in price data, uses of many other statistical series are seriously jeopardized."

The full text of the ASA letter can be viewed or downloaded at <http://www.amstat.org/outreach/pdfs/ASALettertoUNSpecialRapporteur8-12-11-1.pdf>

About the American Statistical Association

Headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, the American Statistical Association is the world's largest community of statisticians and the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States. For 170 years, the ASA has supported excellence in the development, application, and dissemination of statistical science through meetings, publications, membership services, education, accreditation, and advocacy. Its members serve in industry, government, and academia in more than 90 countries, advancing research and promoting sound statistical practice to inform public policy and improve human welfare. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the ASA web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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