

Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights
William Seltzer, Chair
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Ministro de Economía y Finanzas Públicas
Lic. Amado Boudou
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1 April 2011

Your Excellency,

I am writing you as Chair of the American Statistical Association's Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights.

We have recently read press reports and received communications from several Argentine and other Latin American statisticians concerning legal steps, including allegations that threatening letters were apparently issued to about a dozen individual statisticians and enterprises engaged in work on price statistics. The authority for these actions is said to be based on laws that originated during the military dictatorship of Reynaldo Bignone (1982-1983).

These reports and communications also allege that confiscatory fines were imposed, in several cases amounting to 500,000 Argentine pesos (approximately US \$ 100,000 – 125,000). These fines are said to be under appeal.

According to these press reports, some of the targeted private sector statistical organizations were instructed to submit details of their methodology to INDEC for approval. This is particularly ironic since an important reason that data users turned to private firms for price data was dissatisfaction with INDEC methods.

We are aware that allegations related to politically inspired manipulation of the collection and dissemination of consumer price data by INDEC date back to 2007. In that year, INDEC personnel were allegedly forced to resign because they refused to alter well-established methodologies for the collection and analysis of price statistics. (Many of the statisticians involved were and are well-known internationally as responsible and well-qualified statisticians with distinguished careers in official statistics.)

By 2009 the alleged continuing manipulation and suppression of INDEC price statistics became a topic of international concern and discussion. Two papers were presented on the subject at the 2009 session of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) held in Durban, South Africa, in August of that year in a session on ethical issues in official

statistics. Slightly revised versions of these two papers, “Recent developments in price and related statistics in Argentina” by Edmundo Berumen and Victor A. Beker and “How to react when the independence of statisticians and the integrity of statistics are endangered?” by Jean-Louis Bodin, were published in the *Statistical Journal of the International Association of Official Statistics* (Vol. 27, No. 1-2 / 2011). (Although INDEC was afforded an opportunity to comment on these papers, it did not respond to this invitation.)

Inspired by these concerns, later in 2009, ASA President Sally Morton wrote to the head of the Argentine statistical society [Sociedad Argentina de Estadística (SAE)] to “commend the efforts of the Sociedad Argentina de Estadística (SAE) to defend the independence of national statistical agencies and to offer the support of the American Statistical Association (ASA).”

From the information alleged, it would appear that the Argentine government seems to have transformed the issue from one involving statistical ethics and statistical integrity to one involving human rights where private-sector statisticians face threats and confiscatory fines for using statistical methods and doing statistical work the government does not approve of.

Based on the information received to date, I have been requested to prepare a report on the subject for the Board of Directors of the American Statistical Association, which will be meeting next week. However, before completing this report I wanted to benefit from any comments and clarifications the government may wish to make. In other words, is my account substantially correct or, if not, how should it be corrected?

Please accept my highest regards.

Yours sincerely,

William Seltzer
Chair, ASA Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights

cc: Secretario de Comercio Interior
Lic. Guillermo Moreno
Government of Argentina

Executive Director, American Statistical Association