

Argentina must protect social mobilization, not silence it

Social and human rights organizations express our deep concern over the brutal repression of social protest in Argentina on Wednesday 12. The “march for the retired” has been taking place every Wednesday for months in Buenos Aires against cuts in pensions and medicine provision in a context of fierce economic adjustment.

The action of the security forces with the sole objective of dispersing the protest was abusive and disproportionate, contrary to regional and international standards that protect the right to protest. More than twenty people were hospitalized and 114 people were detained, including two children. After several hours, the courts of the City of Buenos Aires released them for lack of information on the reasons for the arrests.

An 87-year-old retired woman was pushed and hit in the head by a member of the Federal Police. Photographer Pablo Grillo was hit in the head by a tear gas canister while taking pictures of the march and is hospitalized in critical condition. A boy and a girl were affected by the gas as they were leaving a school in the area. The police fired rubber bullets into people's faces, injuring several of them, and used pepper spray at close range. Older adults, children, young people, men and women were indiscriminately dispersed from the surroundings of the National Congress through the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, hydrant trucks and tonfa batons. This is the result of the violent repression of those who demonstrated last Wednesday.

The use of gas guns such as the one that injured Pablo Grillo was forbidden in the protests until the government of Javier Milei repealed the resolution that provided for it. According to the regulation issued by the current government in December 2023, any demonstration with street or road blockades is a crime. In addition, the Argentine government enabled the security forces to disperse demonstrations, to carry firearms in protest contexts and to collect information in order to criminalize those who participate in the demonstrations.

The repression of social protest and the criminalization of protesters have been consolidated as a tool of the Argentine government to intimidate and silence dissident voices, reducing the democratic space in the country. Throughout 2024 more than 93 people were arbitrarily detained for participating in protests and more than 600 were injured of varying degrees of severity. The March 12 episode evidences an alarming increase in the number of people detained and injured in a single protest.

Also of concern is the narrative constructed by the State over the last year to justify violence against protesters. Senior government officials described the popular demonstrations as “an attempt to destabilize the government”, “a coup d'état” and spoke of “terrorist leaders”. In official statements, the Minister of Security of Argentina defended the police action and stated that they will seek the criminalization of the demonstrators for “sedition” and of the judge who released the detained persons. She also promised to expel the migrants who participated in the protest.

The escalation of violence by the Argentine State and in particular the rhetoric of “destabilization” jeopardize the rights of a democratic society, such as social protest and freedom of expression.

We express our solidarity with the demands of the Argentine people for better living conditions and urge the authorities to comply with their international obligations and to fully investigate police actions in order to sanction misconduct. We closely follow the shrinking of civic space in Argentina and call on the government to establish a safe and enabling environment for the expression of dissenting voices. We express concern about the advance of authoritarianism in Argentina and its consequences for the entire region, and urge Latin American states to speak out in defense of democracy and the human rights of Latin American peoples.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Amnesty International

Organizacion Mundial contra la Tortura (OMCT)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Oficina en Washington para Asuntos Latinoamericanos (WOLA)

CIVICUS Global Alliance

Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL)

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Omega Research Foundation

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU)

Legal Resources Centre (LRC)

Commision for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS)

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Artigo 19 - Brasil

Conectas Direitos Humanos

Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR)

Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (APRODEH)

Centro de Estudios de Derechos, Justicia y Sociedad (Dejusticia)

Centro de Políticas Públicas y Derechos Humanos (Peru EQUIDAD)

Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos - INREDH

Movimiento en Resistencia contra las Agresiones Oculares (MOCAO Colombia)

ILEX Acción Jurídica

Temblores ONG

Fundación Foro Nacional por Colombia

Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CPDH)

Centro de Derechos y Desarrollo (CEDAL)

Corporación de Defensa de los Derechos Pueblo (CODEPU)

Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH)

Casa Centroamérica en México

JusticiaYa, Guatemala

Instituto Interamericano de Paz y Reconciliación (INSPyRE)
Programa Somos Defensores, Colombia
Kilómetro 0, Puerto Rico
Comisión Ecuménica de Derechos Humanos
Comité de Acción Jurídica (CAJ)
Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (LIMEDDH)
Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos - República Dominicana (CNDH-RD)
Observatorio Ciudadano Chile
Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador
Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Violencia Policial de Chile
Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos -Colombia
Campaña Defender la Libertad un asunto de todas - Colombia
Programa Compañeros de Ciudad Juárez -Chihuahua, México
Corporación Justicia y Democracia - Colombia
Corporación Democracia en Acción (DEMOS) de Colombia
Írídia, centro por la defensa de los derechos humanos -Cataluña-España
Movimiento RegularizaciónYa, España
Novembre Feminista (Ca La Dona) Catalunya
Associació Ca la Dona, Barcelona
Centro de Investigación y Defensa Sur, de Wallmapu Chile (CIDSUR)
Acción Ecológica
Stop Balas de Goma
Mapa de la Policía
Entrepueblos-Entrepobles-Entrepobos-Herriarte España
Fundación para la Defensa, Promoción de los Derechos Humanos y el Desarrollo Sostenible
(Fundesos)
Coordinación Colombia Europa estados Unidos (CCEEU) - Colombia
Instituto Latinoamericano para una sociedad y un derecho alternativos - Ilsa
Corporación compromiso - Colombia
Humanidad Vigente Corporación - Colombia