

## Voice of America (VOA)

September 9, 2004

### **Thousands Rally in Buenos Aires for Justice in 1994 Bombing**

By Brian Byrnes  
Buenos Aires

Thousands of people gathered in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires on Wednesday to speak out against a recent court verdict that acquitted five men charged in connection with a 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in the capital. The court ruling has angered Jews and non-Jews throughout Argentina who are demanding that the Argentine government do more to bring to justice the perpetrators of the bloodiest terrorist attack ever committed on Argentine soil.

Standing just two blocks from where his 21-year-old daughter Paola was killed, Luis Czyzewski repeats a sentiment shared by many Argentines. "We feel that impunity has defeated justice in this case," he says.

The case is the July 18, 1994, bombing of the headquarters of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association, known by its Spanish acronym as AMIA. Eighty-five people were killed and some 300 were injured. More than 10 years later, no one has ever been convicted for the attack.

Last week, a three-judge court panel acquitted five Argentine men who had been charged with providing the vehicle used to destroy the seven-story AMIA building. The court cited lack of evidence and mistakes made during the investigation by the prosecutors. Analysts say one of those mistakes was a \$400,000 payment authorized by a judge no longer connected to the case to buy the testimony of one of the defendants.

"I think the verdict exposes a conspiracy to cover up what really happened," says Sergio Kiernan, an Argentine journalist who has covered the Jewish community center bombing from the start. He says a cover-up was masterminded by the administration of former President Carlos Menem. "Basically, what they did was frame people, and distort evidence and make up things to have culprits, and the case collapsed," he says.

Mr. Menem himself has long been accused of impeding the AMIA investigation. Critics charge that the former president ignored possible leads while he was in office, causing delays that made the hunt for those responsible for the bombing much harder. Some media reports have said that he received a \$10 million bribe from Iran to cover up that country's alleged involvement in the attack. The former president denies impeding the investigation, and Iranian officials deny that their country had any role in the bombing.

Argentine officials believe that Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed extremist group, is responsible for the attack and contend that those who carried it out may have operated in the tri-border region of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, where lax law enforcement and porous borders provide a haven for terrorist activity. But for Julio Bosco, one of Argentina's 300,000 Jews, there is still only one man to blame for a decades worth of frustration.

"The guiltiest person in this case is Menem; he is why all this happened this way," he says.

Sergio Widder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Buenos Aires says he's confident that current Argentine President Nestor Kirchner recognizes the importance of the AMIA case, and that he expects him to push for a new investigation.

"[President Kirchner] said that the AMIA bombing was Argentina's September 11, and the end of this trial shows us that even the president knows very well the importance and the impact of the AMIA bombing," says Mr. Widder. "Argentina failed in bringing those responsible to justice, or even to identify those responsible for the attack."

The lack of answers has angered Argentines of all religions. Luis Czyzewski says the verdict has left the country grieving, but he hopes the protests this week will pressure Argentina's leaders to end the country's culture of impunity. "We have to have to continue fighting so we can know the truth," he says.

For Czyzewski, finding those who took his daughter Paola's life is a truth that has eluded him for too long.