

RELEASE IN FULL

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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() Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s): B6

Declassify: () In Part () In Full

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Date Declassify on Reason

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

SCS-01 SCA-01 L-01 SY-02 H-01 DHA-02 SCCT-01 /040 W
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P 202120Z MAY 76
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5735

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3376

LIMDIS

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Richard Zorn, Senior Reviewer

FOR ARA/APU

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: SHUM, PINS, CASC (BENDER, MERCEDES NAVEIRO) AR
SUBJECT: WELFARE/WHEREABOUTS AMCIT (MERCEDES NAVEIRO BENDER) B-6

REF: BUENOS AIRES 3336

1. SUMMARY. AMCIT (MERCEDES BENDER) WHO HAS PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS IN ARGENTINA, PERSONALLY INFORMED AMCONSULATE MAY 7 THAT SHE HAD BEEN ABDUCTED ON MAY 5, INTERROGATED, BEATEN, THREATENED, THEN RELEASED AFTER TWO DAYS BY GROUP OF ARMED MEN WHO DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS "COMBINED POLICE AND MILITARY COMMAND." EMBASSY HAD LEARNED OF ABDUCTION MAY 5 FROM (BENDER) RELATIVES AND INITIATED IMMEDIATE INQUIRIES THROUGH POLICE CONTACTS. APPARENTLY THROUGH EFFORTS OF THE EMBASSY AND OF (BENDER'S) ARGENTINE RELATIVES, SHE WAS RELEASED, BUT WITHOUT GOA ACKNOWLEDGMENT AT ANY POINT THAT ITS SECURITY FORCES HAD DETAINED HER OR KNEW ANYTHING OF THE MATTER. AS RESULT OF THREATS OF HER ABDUCTORS BEFORE HER RELEASE, (BENDER) WITHDREW COMPLAINT FILED BY RELATIVES WITH POLIICE AND HAS INSISTED THAT EMBASSY MAKE NO RPT NO REPRESENTATIONS TO GOA. DEPT REQUESTED TO PROTECT ALL INFORMATION CONCERNING INCIDENT FOR TIME BEING. (MRS. BENDER) IS CONSIDERING LEAVING ARGENTINA. END SUMMARY. B-6

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2. SUBJECT IS MERCEDES NAVEIRO BENDER, DPOB FEB 3, 1942, ARGENTINA; ISSUED US PPT NO. C-696297 ON MAR 24, 1972 IN WASHINGTON, D. C.; NATURALIZED US CITIZEN, PETITION NO. 36020, US CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION NO. 8634317 ISSUED NOV 12, 1963 IN WASHINGTON, D. C.; RESIDING JUNIN 1083 5TH FLOOR APT B, BUENOS AIRES; TELEPHONE 847303. MRS. BENDER IS DIVORCED WIFE OF FORMER FSO LYNN BENDER WHO IS NOW DEAN AND PROFESSOR AT INTER-AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO AT SAN GERMAN, PR. B-6

3. EMBASSY LEARNED LATE MAY 5 FROM ARGENTINE RELATIVES OF MRS. BENDER THAT SHE HAD BEEN ABDUCTED FROM HER HOME DURING THE EARLY MORNING OF THE SAME DAY. EMBASSY SECURITY OFFICER, LEGAL ATTACHE, AND LOCAL SECURITY SUPERVISOR IMMEDIATELY CALLED GOA POLICE CONTACTS, ALL OF WHOM DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF ARREST OR OF MRS. BENDER'S WHEREABOUTS. DURING SAME PERIOD HER UNCLE MR. LUCIO BALLESTER, UNDER SEC OF STATE FOR INDUSTRY AND DEVELOPMENT IN MIN ECONOMY, MADE ORAL COMPLAINTS OF KIDNAPPING TO POLICE. B-6

4. MRS. BENDER CAME TO CONSULATE IN AFTERNOON OF MAY 7 AND MADE ORAL AND WRITTEN STATEMENTS TO CONSULAR OFFICER. SHE CLAIMED THAT ABDUCTORS HAD BEATEN HER, AND MARKS AND BRUISES WERE EVIDENT. EMBASSY MEDICAL DOCTOR (ARGENTINE CONSULTANT) WAS CALLED TO CONSULATE IMMEDIATELY TO EXAMINE MRS. BENDER (ON MAY 14 HE SUBMITTED WRITTEN STATEMENT CONFIRMING EVIDENCE OF BLOWS AND HANDCUFF MARKS, AS WELL AS COMMENT THAT "PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT ON HER IS VERY MARKED.") B-6

5. MRS. BENDER WAS IN HIGHLY EMOTIONAL STATE, AND WRITTEN STATEMENT WAS SHORT. IT WAS NOT SWORN. SHE WROTE THAT SHE WAS ABDUCTED FROM HER APARTMENT ON NIGHT OF MAY 5 BY SIX ARMED MEN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES, UNKNOWN TO HER. THE MEN STOLE MONEY AND JEWELRY AND THEN TOOK HER BLINDFOLDED AND HANDCUFFED TO AN UNKNOWN LOCATION. SHE WAS INTERROGATED ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS, KEPT BLINDFOLDED MOST OF THE TIME AND HANDCUFFED, AND THREATENED REPEATEDLY WITH TORTURE AND DEATH. SHE WAS FINALLY RELEASED, SHE WROTE, AS THE RESULT OF PRESSURE FROM RELATIVES AND THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, ON CONDITION THAT SHE WOULD WITHDRAW CHARGES OF "LOOTING THE HOUSE." SHE WAS FORCED TO SIGN STATEMENT WHICH, IN HER WORDS, "INVOLVED ME IN AN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER." B-6

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ABDUCTORS TOOK PHOTOS OF HER IN FRONT OF FLAG OF REVOLUTIONARY ARMY OF PEOPLE (ERP), AN ARGENTINE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, WHICH WOULD BE USED IN EVENT SHE SHOULD DO ANYTHING TO INCRIMINATE ABDUCTORS OR MAKE ANY COMPLAINTS.

6. BOTH WRITTEN STATEMENT AND DOCTOR'S CERTIFICATE WILL BE POUCHED TO DEPT.

7. ORAL STATEMENT TO CONSULAR OFFICER WAS FAR MORE DETAILED, AND INCLUDED CHARGE THAT SHE WAS BEATEN. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY OF CONSULAR OFFICER'S NOTES. ABOUT 2:00 A.M. MAY 5, SIX MEN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES, ARMED WITH PISTOLS, APPEARED AT HER APARTMENT AND DEMANDED ENTRY ON THREAT OF "SHOOTING DOOR DOWN." SHE WAS TOLD SHE WAS UNDER ARREST, BLINDFOLDED, HANDCUFFED, AND PUT IN A CAR. BEFORE LEAVING, GROUP RANSACKED APARTMENT AND TOOK JEWELRY WITH ESTIMATED VALUE OF US \$5,000 AND US \$1,000 IN CASH, AS WELL AS OTHER VALUABLES SUCH AS CAMERAS, STEREO SET, TYPEWRITER, ETC. SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING AREA IN CAR WITH HER, GROUP RETURNED TO BUILDING AND LEFT SOME OF BULKIER ITEMS IN LOBBY. NONE OF JEWELRY, CASH, OR OTHER PERSONAL ITEMS HAS BEEN RETURNED. SHE HAS NOT YET MADE FULL INVENTORY OF MISSING ITEMS.

8. AFTER PUSHING HER DOWN OUT OF SIGHT IN CAR, ABDUCTORS DROVE FOR DISTANCE SHE ESTIMATES AS 30 KILOMETERS TO OUTSKIRTS OF BUENOS AIRES TO A COUNTRY HOUSE. DURING ARREST SHE CONTINUALLY REPEATED TO GROUP THAT SHE WAS AMERICAN CITIZEN. THEY RESPONDED THAT THERE WAS NO DIFFERENCE TO THEM BETWEEN ARGENTINE AND AMERICAN AND THAT IF SHE DID NOT BEHAVE THEY WOULD SHOOT HER AND DROP HER ON ROAD.

9. AT DETENTION LOCATION ABDUCTORS DESCRIBED THEMSELVES TO HER AS A "NAZI-FASCIST AND ANTI-SEMITIC ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO COMBATING SUBVERSION, LEFTIST ELEMENTS, AMERICAN COOPERATION AND CAPITALISM, AS WELL AS JEWISH PLOT TO CONTROL WORLD." SHE WAS SEARCHED AND LETTERS AND NOTEBOOK TAKEN. NOTEBOOK CONTAINED NAME "PARTIDO POPULAR CRISTIANO," WHICH CAPTORS DESCRIBED AS "LEFTIST POLITICAL PARTY TOO."

10. WHILE BLINDFOLDED, [MRS. BENDER] SAID SHE HEARD VOICES OF ABOUT EIGHT DIFFERENT PERSONS, SOME APPARENTLY AS YOUNG AS
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16 OR 17, BEING BEATEN, KICKED AND OTHERWISE TORTURED. SHE IDENTIFIED VOICES OF HER ARGENTINE ACQUAINTANCES [RAUL PREMAT AND HIS WIFE.] SHE COULD HEAR SCREAMS AND CRIES OF PERSONS BEING TORTURED WITH ELECTRIC PRODS. SHE HEARD [MRS. PREMAT IN DELIRIUM AFTER SUCH TORTURE AND MR. PREMAT BEGGING FOR MEDICAL DOCTOR.] [MRS. BENDER] BELIEVES [PREMAT] MAY BE DEAD NOW, AND STATED THAT GUARD TOLD HER THAT FOUR PEOPLE HAD DIED IN TWO DAYS SHE WAS DETAINED.

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00
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----- 116648

P 202120Z MAY 76
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5736

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3376

11. [MRS. BENDER] SAID THAT DURING HER INTERROGATIONS SHE WAS HIT IN FACE AND BACK OF HEAD. PERSON SHE TOOK TO BE HEAD OF GROUP INTRODUCED HIMSELF TO HER AS AN AIR FORCE COLONEL. HE TOLD HER SHE HAD BEEN ARRESTED BECAUSE SHE WAS INVOLVED IN "INTERNATIONAL SUBVERSIVE ORGANIZATION" AND WAS POLITICAL ASSOCIATE AND FRIEND OF [PREMAT] WHO WERE CONSIDERED SUBVERSIVES AND LEFTIST ACTIVISTS. SHE RESPONDED THAT [PREMAT] OWNER OF AN ADVERTISING FIRM, WHOM SHE KNEW TO FAVOR "SOCIAL-IST IDEOLOGY," WAS ONLY A FRIEND. HE WAS NOT TO HER KNOWLEDGE A SUBVERSIVE, POLITICAL ACTIVIST, OR TERRORIST.

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12. [MRS. BENDER] FELT ABDUCTORS WERE PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED. THEY WERE EFFICIENT, KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING, AND WERE

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"TOTALLY SYSTEMATIC." INTERROGATORS TOLD HER THEY DID NOT CARE IF SHE WAS AMERICAN AS SHE HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED AND NO ONE KNEW WHERE SHE WAS. THEY WERE ONLY ONES WHO WOULD DECIDE WHETHER SHE WOULD WALK OUT ALIVE OR "FEET FIRST." FINALLY, ABDUCTORS SAID THEY WOULD RELEASE HER ONLY IF SHE SIGNED STATEMENT DICTATED BY THE COLONEL TO "NOTARY PUBLIC," CONFIRMING THAT SHE WAS INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL SUBVERSIVE ORGANIZATION. SHE WAS THREATENED REPEATEDLY THAT IF SHE MADE ANY COMPLAINT, TO ANYONE, SHE WOULD BE FOLLOWED AND KILLED ANYWHERE IN WORLD. SHE WAS TOLD THAT THEY HAD HER TELEPHONE TAPPED. HER PICTURE WAS TAKEN BEFORE ERP FLAG AND SHE WAS WARNED THAT IF SHE REVEALED DETAILS OF CONFINEMENT, PICTURES AND SIGNED STATEMENT WOULD BE GIVEN TO POLICE AND PRESS. COLONEL TOLD HER THAT HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO KILL HER, BUT SHE WAS "MEMBER OF (ARGENTINE) OLIGARCHY" AND ARGENTINA WAS STILL DEPENDENT
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UPON AMERICAN HELP. INTERROGATORS KNEW THAT HER UNCLE WAS COMPLAINING TO POLICE, AND SAID THAT "AMERICAN EMBASSY IS DRIVING US CRAZY TRYING TO FIND OUT WHERE SHE WAS BEING HELD." SHE WAS MADE TO PROMISE TO WITHDRAW ANY COMPLAINTS MADE TO POLICE, WHICH SHE DID UPON RELEASE. SHE STATED THAT SHE FELT HER LIFE WAS SAVED ONLY BY QUICK INTERVENTION OF EMBASSY AND HER RELATIVES.

13. COMMENT. ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES AT NO TIME HAVE ADMITTED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF MRS. BENDER'S ABDUCTION OR ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT. BASED ON ALL EVIDENCE AVAILABLE, IT APPEARS THAT AN ABDUCTION DID TAKE PLACE, THAT MRS. BENDER WAS HELD FOR TWO DAYS BY UNKNOWN PERSONS, THAT SHE WAS BEATEN, AND THAT SHE IS IN DEEP FEAR FOR HER SAFETY. ASSUMING HER STORY IS TRUE, MOST LIKELY EXPLANATION IS THAT ABDUCTORS WERE INDEED MEMBERS OF ARGENTINE SECURITY FORCES, ACTING EITHER WITH AUTHORIZATION OF GOA OR IN "EXTRACURRICULAR" FASHION REMINISCENT OF ARGENTINE "TRIPLE A" OR BRAZILIAN "DEATH SQUADS." WHILE IT IS NOT COMPLETELY IMPOSSIBLE THAT ABDUCTORS WERE PRIVATE PERSONS ACTING WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION OR KNOWLEDGE OF GOA, FACT THAT THEY COULD CARRY OUT SUCH AN OPERATION, ARMED, IN PRESENT SECURITY CLIMATE IN ARGENTINA POINTS TO GOA ACQUIESCENCE AT MINIMUM. ABDUCTORS ALSO APPARENTLY WELL AWARE OF SPECIFIC EFFORTS BEING MADE TO OBTAIN RELEASE OF MRS. BENDER AGAIN SUGGESTING OFFICIAL CONTACTS. B6

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14. UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WE WOULD MAKE STRONG PROTEST TO GOA OVER INCIDENT, WHICH IS FIRST OF ITS NATURE INVOLVING AMCIT TO COME TO OUR ATTENTION UNDER NEW MILITARY REGIME. WE PRESUME GOA WOULD SIMPLY DENY ANY KNOWLEDGE OF INCIDENT, HOWEVER, AND [MRS. BENDER] HAS REPEATEDLY INSISTED THAT SHE DOES NOT WISH SUCH A PROTEST TO BE MADE IN ANY EVENT. SHE HAS ASKED THAT NO PUBLIC USE BE MADE OF ANY OF THIS INFORMATION. SHE FEARS FOR HER LIFE, AND IS TRYING TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO LEAVE ARGENTINA. WE HAVE ASSURED HER THAT INFORMATION SHE HAS REPORTED WILL NOT BE COMPROMISED IN ANY WAY, AND [AT HER REQUEST WE ARE HELPING HER TO COMMUNICATE WITH HER FORMER HUSBAND.]

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15. PENDING [MRS. BENDER'S] DEPARTURE FROM ARGENTINA AND/OR HER AUTHORIZATION TO TAKE THE MATTER TO THE GOA, WE WILL CONFIDENTIAL

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CONTINUE TO TRY TO OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION. WE TAKE THE MATTER WITH THE UTMOST SERIOUSNESS, AND CONSIDER IT AN OMINOUS DEVELOPMENT. IF IT CAN BE ESTABLISHED THAT THE GOA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR OR HAD ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE ABDUCTION, WE WILL CONSULT WITH DEPT ON ACTION TO BE TAKEN.
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