

Urgent Press Release: March 19, 1992
VICTORY FOR GAYS IN ARGENTINA

On Thursday, March 19, 1992 the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA) received legal recognition from the executive branch of the Argentine government. This official recognition came after 3 years of unsuccessful court battles, ultimately ending on November 25, 1991 with the Supreme Court of Argentina upholding the denial of legal status to the organization.

"Today the executive branch passed over the resolution of the Supreme Court and granted status to CHA due to international pressure," stated Raphael Freda, former President of CHA, "It is a tremendous victory for us, and a tremendous victory for you [the international gay and lesbian community] as well."

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), through direct communication with the leaders of CHA, coordinated and mobilized an international pressure campaign to secure legal status for CHA. A coalition of international organizations met President Menem at every point of his U.S. and European state visits, with demonstrations held in Washington D.C. and New York just prior to the court decision, and similar actions taking place in Paris, France and Brussels, Belgium just after the denial of legal recognition. International outrage over the Supreme Court decision led to a number of offers from the General Inspection of Justice (a part of the executive branch of Argentina) to CHA, offers that asked in exchange that CHA change their stated objectives. These offers were rejected by CHA's membership, and plans were initiated to take the case to the Inter-American Courts in Costa Rica. Finally, on March 19th, CHA triumphantly accepted another offer from the General Inspection of Justice with no strings attached, and in what must be viewed as a complete vindication of their struggle.

"Now we can exist as an institution," responded Monica Santino, Co-President of CHA, "But it doesn't mean that it is the end of the fight. Now we're going on to fight for our human rights, for individual liberties, and against discrimination towards homosexuals."


"The simple freedom of assembly has finally been granted to gays and lesbians in Argentina" stated Julie Dorf, Executive Director of IGLHRC. "This long struggle reminds us all that human rights for gays & lesbian are still a serious battle in most of the world. In Argentina, the fight continues against the church, and to challenge the outrageous Supreme Court decision through the Inter-American Court in Costa Rica."

The only mechanism to challenge the legal precedent established by the Supreme Court decision is to take the case to the Inter-American Commission in Washington D.C., at which point the Commission would then take the case on behalf of CHA to the Inter-American Court in Costa Rica.

Also of pressing concern has been a recent conservative backlash led by the Roman Catholic Archbishop in Buenos Aires. Following inflammatory and homophobic statements by Monsenor Quarraccino on national T.V. in which he praised the Supreme Court decision and referred to the "deviation" and "animalism" of gay men and lesbians, a gay man was murdered in Mendoza. It is speculated that the murder was committed by a group known as the "Morality Brigade", and it is the first assassination of a gay man in Argentina since 1982. On March 5, 1992 a demonstration organized by 4 groups: CHA, Gays for Civil Rights, Convocatoria Lesbiana, and the MCC Church took place in the Plaza De Mayo to protest the murder, and received extensive national press coverage.

"The wall of silence has been broken. Lesbian and gay visibility is here to stay" says Freda, "No child who senses he or she has a different sexuality will fear that he or she is the only one in the world. We can [now] offer some role models to future generations."

For more information: Please contact Enrique Santos in Buenos Aires at 54-1-362-8261 or Russ Gage at the IGLHRC (415) 255-8680.



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Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA) Legal Status Fact Sheet March 19, 1992

Compiled by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights
Commission

April 1984 - CHA is formed.

1989 - General Inspection of Justice (an agency of the executive branch) denies legal capacity to CHA. CHA appeals to Appellate Courts.

1990 - The Appellate Courts confirm the decision of the General Inspection of Justice. CHA appeals to Supreme Court.

Oct. 25, 1991 - The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) demonstrates against anti-gay persecution in Argentina at the Argentine Consulate in San Francisco. Demands for legal recognition of CHA are presented.

Nov. 15 1991 - Pres. Menem speaks at the National Press Club in Washington D.C.. ACT UP D.C. demonstrates outside of the National Press Club, while inside a representative of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations hands Menem a packet of demands in support of CHA. A joint statement from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and the Intl Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) demanding recognition for CHA is also handed to Menem. Later that evening several hundred gay activists deviate from their march against anti-gay violence by D.C. police to stop at the Argentine embassy and protest the discrimination against gays and lesbians in Argentina.

Nov. 19, 1991 - Menem speaks at Columbia Univ. in N.Y.. ACT UP Americas and the Latino Gay Men of NY hold a demonstration outside. Inside members of the groups address questions to Menem regarding CHA. Menem responds that he has already arranged for the legal status of CHA.

Nov. 25, 1991 - Supreme Ct. of Argentina rules 7-2 to uphold the denial of legal status to CHA.

Jan. 6, 1992 - Argentinian gay man is granted political asylum in Canada based on persecution due to sexual orientation.

February 13, 1992 - Pres. Menem visits Brussels. The ILGA presents a letter of protest to the Argentine Embassy, which was to be handed directly to Pres. Menem.

February 17, 1992 - Pres. Menem visits Paris. A statement from Project Ornicar, a Paris gay and lesbian human rights group, demanding legal recognition for CHA greets Menem in gay Paris.

March 5, 1992 - CHA, Gays for Civil Rights, Convocatoria Lesbiana, and the MCC Church demonstrate in Plaza De Mayo in Buenos Aires to protest the murder of a gay man in Mendoza.

March 19, 1992 - The General Inspection of Justice passes over the Supreme Court ruling and grants CHA legal status.