



Published: 03.25.2008

Argentines recall 1976 coup that launched bloody dictatorship

By Bill Cormier

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Thousands of Argentines marched to mark Monday's anniversary of a 1976 military coup that launched seven years of dictatorship, carrying banners bearing photographs of the people who disappeared under the junta.

"Thirty thousand comrades detained and disappeared: now and forever present," human rights activists chanted, referring to the number of people they say were killed or who never reappeared after being detained during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. The official figure is nearly 13,000.

The march through Buenos Aires was led by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, graying activists in white kerchiefs who are still searching for loved ones still missing from the dictatorship. An Associated Press reporter at the march estimated the crowd at 10,000 people.

Earlier Monday, government human rights secretary Eduardo Luis Duhalde opened a memorial service at the biggest torture center of the past dictatorship, the former Navy Mechanics' School. The anniversary is now a holiday called "Day of Memory and Justice."

Duhalde said the deaths and disappearances of thousands of Argentines "still causes great pain."

"Nobody deserved to be the target of such hate," he said as he opened an interfaith memorial service at the former military school, which has been transformed into a museum in honor of the estimated 5,000 victims that passed through its doors. Many are believed to have been executed as part of a crackdown on leftists known as the "dirty war."

President Cristina Fernandez, who took office in December promising human rights issues were a priority, did not take part in this year's events. But she has vowed to see major trials of junta-era abuses concluded during her four-year term.

Marchers on Monday urged officials to speed up the trials.

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