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INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

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AFRICA

Zaire

Mobutu Announces Amnesty. In an extemporaneous speech on June 24, President Mobutu announced that he intended to submit a draft law to the Legislative Council providing amnesty for Zairian refugees living in neighboring countries. On June 27 the Council unanimously approved the measure and extended it to include political prisoners in Zaire accused of "attacking the security of the state." According to Zairian radio, Mobutu is expected to sign the bill within the next few days. Opposition groups in Paris and Brussels have already declared that they do not intend to take advantage of the amnesty. (CONFIDENTIAL, Kinshasa 6603, June 24; UNCLASSIFIED, FBIS, June 27)

INR Comment The amnesty, combined with other measures that Mobutu announced on June 24, indicates a more forthcoming attitude on his part toward pressures for reform. The amnesty and the end of the emergency in Shaba also pave the way for additional steps toward improved relations between the Kinshasa regime and Shaba. What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which Mobutu will, in fact, follow through. (CONFIDENTIAL)

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina

Human Rights Trends (INR Review and Analysis). Argentina's human rights record in 1978 displays some improvement over the 1976-77 period, but conditions have changed little in the last six months. Serious abuses still occur, despite reports of efforts by military officials to curb renegade counterterrorist activities. There is a reasonable prospect for gradual but significant improvement over the next year or so, however. In the meantime, the Argentines will probably pursue a damage-limiting strategy in their relations with the US.

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In recent weeks, President Videla's government has taken several noteworthy steps that are designed primarily to defuse human rights criticism during the OAS General Assembly (June 21-30).

--On June 20, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission was invited to pay a "special visit" to investigate "legal-judicial conditions."

--President Videla is said to have informed an archbishop on June 19 that 14 labor leaders would be released and the cases of others reviewed.

--Alfredo Bravo, a well-known labor leader and rights activist, returned home on conditional liberty on June 16 after 10 months in jail.

--Two restrictions on press freedom were rescinded on June 5.

Implementation of well-timed human rights "concessions" has been a consistent Argentine tactic over the past two years.

The prospects for gradual improvement during the coming months will be enhanced by the continued diminution of the terrorist threat and the likelihood that Videla and his fellow moderates in the armed forces will consolidate their control over the security forces. On the latter point,

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junior and noncommissioned officers have been detained for abuses during security operations, a number of others have been reassigned, and over 400 policemen have been disciplined in the last 18 months. We will be better able to assess the impact of these steps after termination of the artificial environment created by the World Cup soccer competition (June 1-25), during which the security apparatus has been treading very lightly.

Those favoring gradual human rights improvements will argue that such a policy serves Argentina's domestic and international interests.

--Domestically, it will remove human rights considerations as a divisive factor and an inhibition on the military's reconstruction plans.

--Internationally, it will restore Argentina's tarnished image, decrease the possibility of new political and

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economic sanctions, and open the way to improved relations with the US.

The Argentines are willing to abide strained relations with the US because they assign a higher priority to their counterterrorist objectives. Videla will feel forced to react, however, when, as called for by the Kennedy-Humphrey Amendment, all US security assistance is terminated on September 30. Even so, he will probably try to assuage nationalistic sensitivities without unduly affronting the US. (CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN)

Brazil

Geisel Announces Constitutional Reform. Embassy Brasilia reports that in a nationwide address on June 23 President Geisel announced a constitutional reform package which would re-establish the principle of habeas corpus "in cases of political crimes against the national security and the economic and social order." Elaborating on the reform package, which still must win congressional approval, Geisel stated that it would also:

- provide legal guarantees of life tenure for the judiciary;
- assure the inviolability of legislators exercising their mandate to speak and vote (except in cases of crimes against national security);
- regulate the organization and functions of political parties; and
- end presidential authority to recess legislative bodies, declare a state of siege without legislative consent, suspend individual political rights, and banish Brazilians.

Noting that the reform package was neither perfect nor exhaustive, the President indicated that it was "better to have a good package that can be approved in good time than to try for an optimum result that might never be achieved." He added that the package represented "the closing of a first cycle of reforms that my government proposes to make."

The Embassy considers that Geisel's current effort represents a considerable and positive step forward, reflecting pressures that have been exerted on the regime largely through public debate by an aroused civilian elite supported by broad segments in the military. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

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