

Vatican and Argentina to Release 'Dirty War' Archives Soon



Vatican City, October 27 (RHC)-- The Vatican and Argentina will soon release archives from the country's 1976-83 "Dirty War," when a military dictatorship killed as many as 30,000 people in a crackdown on left-wing opponents. Officials said the archives contain nearly 3,000 letters between the Roman Catholic Church and relatives of the dictatorship's victims. Human rights groups have accused Catholic officials of covering up abuses by the junta when it was in power.

The declassification was ordered by Pope Francis, a former Buenos Aires archbishop, a joint statement from the Vatican and Argentina's Church hierarchy said. The archives will be made available exclusively to relatives of victims, or victims still surviving.

The Argentinean Church's reputation was tarnished by links between some high-ranking clergymen and the military rulers. Critics said that Francis did not do enough for priests who challenged the dictatorship when he was the leader of the Jesuits in Argentina.

Survivors of the crackdown said one of the military rulers' tactics was so-called "death flights," in which political opponents were tossed into aircraft, stripped and then thrown alive into a river or the Atlantic Ocean to drown.

This followed the 2002 declassification of more than 4,000 U.S. State Department cables and other

archives from the dictatorship, which the U.S. government initially supported.

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