

23 September 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Exhibit on the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo**

There are few events in the collective history of Latin America that are as dark as those that inspired this exhibit.

During the 70's and 80's our region was held captive under a vast network of military dictatorships. Regional cooperation was limited to those operations coordinated by intelligence operatives. Death squads methodically terrorized, kidnapped and murdered thousands of our brothers and sisters: union organizers, farmers, workers, politicians, artists, teachers and professors.

A generation was exiled. And it is taking another generation to restore the losses to the continent. Their creativity, solidarity and vision may well have placed Latin America on the road to economic and social justice. We are still struggling to overcome the shameful legacy of betrayal and loss.

But even in the darkest moments, when most were immobilized by fear, the mothers and grandmothers who gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires held up a light, sometimes nothing more than a flickering candle, in protest of the killings, the disappearances and the terror.

These brave women challenged the savage machinery that consumed their children and grandchildren. Through their persistence, the entire world slowly became aware of the crimes that were being committed in the clandestine prisons of towns and cities across Argentina and Latin America. Their example inspired others throughout the region to give witness.

Today, we embrace these women as the heroines they are. By using the names and by remembering their identities through photos, letters and memoirs, they move us to remember and document the crimes that were committed against their loved ones. Today, the research begun decades ago continues with the creation of genetic identity banks, working with groups in Peru and Guatemala, which aim to prove human rights violations and make it possible to further identify the victims.

They remind us so clearly that their daughters and sons are also our brothers and sisters. By acknowledging this fundamental truth, we can muster the confidence and courage to do like las abuelas, the grandmothers, to defend what is right and to protect those who are vulnerable.