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CHILE'S BACHELET REJECTS WEISFEILER'S REQUEST IN MISSING BROTHER CASE

Weisfeiler Demands "Immediate Action" from U.S. Government

(April 9, 2008) Olga Weisfeiler disclosed this week that Chilean President Michelle Bachelet has denied her requests to pressure judicial officials investigating the 1985 disappearance of her brother, Boris Weisfeiler. She also criticized U.S. government officials for failing to discuss the case during the March visit of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

In late February, Weisfeiler wrote to Bachelet criticizing the shortcomings in the investigation into her brother's disappearance. Weisfeiler's letter blasted the investigation for its lack of rigor and organization, saying the failure to advance in the case suggests a lack of interest on the part of Chilean authorities.

"Indeed, I have reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that the stalled investigation of Prof. Weisfeiler's disappearance raises serious questions about your country's commitment to a thorough investigation and resolution of the case of this U.S. citizen's disappearance," Weisfeiler wrote at the time.

Boris Weisfeiler, a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Russia, was a math professor at Pennsylvania State University. He disappeared under suspicious circumstances in 1985 - the waning years of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship - while hiking in the south of Chile.

The government of former dictator Pinochet maintained that Weisfeiler had simply drowned while hiking near Region VIII's Ñuble River. Still, Olga refused to believe these claims.

Then, in 1987, a Chilean military informant known only as "Daniel," told U.S. embassy officials that he was a member of a patrol that arrested a foreign hiker two years earlier and concluded he was a Russian spy. The informant said Boris was alive and being held in Colonia Dignidad, a secretive German colony founded in the 1960s by Paul Schaefer a pedophile and former Nazi air force member.

Besides ruling his followers with an iron fist, Schaefer turned the colony into a torture center used by Pinochet's secret police force during the 17-year dictatorship. It was not until Chile's

return to democracy in the 1990s that the charitable tax status of the organization was revoked and Schaefer prosecuted for crimes committed in Chile.

Encouraged by the declassification of U.S. government documents, Olga first came to Chile to search for information about her brother's death in 2000. In subsequent trips, she met with dozens of officials, including U.S. ambassadors, judges, and Michelle Bachelet, who was serving as Chile's Defense Minister at the time. Olga would meet with Bachelet again in 2006 after she had assumed the presidency.

Still, advances in the case proved to be short-lived. Olga visited the Colonia Dignidad, located near the Region VII town of Parral, in 2004 and 2007. But she always left the colony unsatisfied.

Meanwhile, during her most recent trip to Chile last January, Weisfeiler disclosed that many U.S. documents had still not been translated into Spanish, and that Judge Jorge Zepeda, who is currently in charge of the case, has "has not responded to offers of help from the United States embassy, which includes the cooperation of the F.B.I." (ST, Jan. 30).

Weisfeiler vented her frustration over Zepeda's stubbornness, as well as the case's lack of new leads in her letter to Bachelet. She also ended the letter with a personal appeal, urging Bachelet, who was tortured during the Pinochet dictatorship, to help move the case along.

"Regrettably, as of today, nothing has changed. After eight years of investigation conducted by the Chilean judiciary, we are no closer to a resolution that we were in 2000 when that investigation began... You, of all people, must know how I feel after 23 years of fruitless searching and now eight years of empty promises of thorough investigation and resolution of my brother's case. As President, you have the power to change this grim situation, and I appeal to you to do so," Weisfeiler said.

The letter was also sent to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; current U.S. Ambassador to Chile Paul Simon; current Chilean Ambassador to the United States Mariano Fernández; Chile government Secretary General José Viera-Gallo; U.S. Senators Edward Kennedy, Arlen Specter and Bob Casey; and U.S. Representatives Barney Frank, and John Peterson (ST, March 5).

In an e-mail sent to the Santiago Times, Weisfeiler disclosed that, on April 2, she received a stoic response from Chilean government officials, who said her demands as "impossible" to carry out within the parameters of the "mentioned case."

"I inform you that the Chilean government does not have any ability to interfere in the judicial cases which pass through the country's judicial system. This has been common practice since the return to democracy and also constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of democratic law. Consequently, it is

impossible to interfere in the mentioned case," read the government response.

"I (took) it as slap in my face. Is this the democracy Chile was fighting for?" Weisfeiler told the Santiago Times.

Weisfeiler also said that, by failing to discuss her brother's disappearance during Rice's March visit, the U.S. government blew an opportunity to jump start the investigation.

"The case will not progress until the US government comes forward with a strong statement requesting immediate actions," she said. "Secretary Rice did not raise issue of the Weisfeiler case with President Bachelet during Secretary's recent trip to Chile, and an opportunity to make this case even somehow important to the US government was lost."

During her visit, Rice met with Foreign Minister Alejandro Foxley to discuss U.S.-Chile relations and the current Latin American political situation. The two officials also signed a cooperation agreement between Chile and California, which promotes collaboration in education, agriculture, innovation, energy generation and other arenas (ST, March 17).

By Matt Malinowski (editor@santiagotimes.cl)

TOP NEWS STORIES

BACHELET TO MULL CHILE WHALE SANCTUARY PROPOSAL

(April 9, 2008) Chile appears ever closer to declaring its entire Pacific coastline – one of the longest in the World – a whale "sanctuary." According to government officials, President Michelle Bachelet is likely to endorse the proposal as early as June, when Chile hosts this year's annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

Last year the Center for Cetacean Conservation (CCC) – with support from the National Confederation of Chilean Artisan Fishermen (CONAPACH) and Ecoceanos, a Santiago-based environmental NGO – came up with a plan to prohibit all varieties of whale hunting in Chilean waters. A law already in place outlaws whaling through 2025. CONAPACH's so-called Whale Sanctuary for Chile proposal would extend that law indefinitely.

In recent months the proposal has received almost universal backing, with the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and even the Navy throwing their weight behind it. Some 120 environmental groups around the planet also support the proposed sanctuary.

On Tuesday, the heads of Ecoceanos, the CCC and CONAPACH took the next step in their quest to save the whales, hand delivering their proposal directly to President Bachelet. Also present during the encounter were Socialist Party (PS) Sen. Juan Pablo Letelier and Environment Minister

Ana Lya Uriarte. Given the bipartisan enthusiasm the proposal received in Congress, observers expect that with President Bachelet's support, the whale sanctuary could become law in a relatively short period of time.

"We had an excellent meeting with the president. We discussed how the majority of Chileans are anxious to protect the whales... We're all clear on the fact that the world is better with whales than without them. Not all of us have an opportunity to actually see them. But we know that having them around is better for the planet," said Uriarte.

"Either way there will be new developments before June," the environment minister added.

CCC President Bárbara Galletti, CONAPACH head Zoila Bustamante and Sen. Letelier were all enthusiastic about the meeting. Galletti praised the president's "willingness" to collaborate on the matter and like Uriarte, said she expected a major breakthrough before June. Letelier, meanwhile, insisted the proposal is compatible with other pending marine conservation legislation.

"This is about creating a country where there is respect, deep respect. Respect for our heritage, for our waters, and for life itself. And that's what should be unilaterally declared, that our country offers a sanctuary to the whales," he said.

In declaring such a sanctuary, Chile would follow a precedent already set by Costa Rica and Mexico. Environmentalists hope other nations will eventually follow suit, allowing for the creation of a protected zone covering all of Latin America's Pacific coastal waters.

"The strategy is to continue including larger ocean areas as whale sanctuaries. This could mean that between now and the next 10 years, whale hunting would become an outdated practice... We're convinced that it's an activity that's on the way out. In the southern hemisphere, only Japan (hunts whales)," Ecoceanos Director Juan Carlos Cárdenas told the Santiago Times' sister newspaper, the Patagonia Times.

According to Cárdenas, nearly 50 percent of the world's whale species pass through Chilean waters on a regular basis. Every year, furthermore, Chile hosts a sizeable population of blue whales, which come to feed and reproduce off the northern coast of Chiloé Island. Nearly hunted to extinction during the last century, blue whales – the world's largest creatures – are still very much endangered.

"Especially in the south there are populations that are recovering very, very slowly. In the case of the blue whales north of Chiloé, we have the largest concentration of blue whales in the world right now," said Cárdenas.

By Benjamin Witte (benwitte@santiagotimes.cl)

ANTI-CELCO FISHERMEN TRIAL BEGINS

(April 9, 2008) Testimony began Tuesday in a trial that has split the coastal fishing community of Mehuin, just south of Valdivia. It pits one group of fishermen, who oppose a waste