



Spring 2017 Newsletter

This newsletter is based on excerpts from an article entitled, “Adventist Leaders in Argentina Detained for Allegedly Smuggling Millions in Electronic Goods” by Jared Wright published in Spectrum Magazine dated September 22, 2016 and an article entitled, “Leaders of the Adventist Church in Argentina Resign After Accusations by Authorities”, published in Adventist Today dated February 23, 2017. Jared Wright reported, “leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Argentina have been detained for allegedly smuggling some \$15,000,000 Argentine Pesos (\$991,000 USD) worth of goods into the country”. This represented an estimated \$6,000,000 Pesos (\$396,400 USD) in unpaid import fees.

According to [a report in La Nación](#), Argentina’s leading conservative daily newspaper, crates entered Argentina from the United States labeled as containing donated medical equipment and hand tools. “Customs authorities instead discovered millions of Pesos worth of modern televisions, computers, tablets, smartphones, professional film equipment, music consoles and drones”.

The Argentina Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) was the named recipient of the shipment. In a release, the church denied any wrongdoing, and argued that it had paperwork in place to cover all imports. According to the administration, speaking of taxes and customs, “all the necessary arrangements were made for receipt of the items...., but we learned that there were items exceeding what we expected when the delivery arrived in the country”. That defense does not square with reports from two major news organizations in Argentina published February 17, 2017 about criminal charges against leaders of the Adventist denomination.

“Millions in contraband by Adventist Church: How did they pull it off?” was the headline on the Infobae online news service. The same story was published in the La Nacion newspaper. The news story reported that Pastor Jorge de Sousa

Matias, vice president for development at the university, was caught on a wiretap saying, “we are in trouble ... for three days they have been opening it box by box.” For officials to claim that the smuggled contents were unknown until delivery is not credible given the anonymous tip by email to Jared Wright on August 10, 2016: “For years, the River Plate Adventist University (UAP) authorities (the president, and two or three of his closest collaborators) have been committing smuggling on behalf of the UAP. The procedure is simple: they import some real donations from the US, but in the same container they add some purchases that get into our country without paying the due taxes, quite expensive over here”. The allegations in the email could not be independently verified by Spectrum.

Pastor Carlos Gill, president of the Argentina Union Conference, released a video on Facebook and YouTube explaining the situation. He said that the denomination would contest the charges filed by a judge because they included “omissions ... exaggerations [and] inaccurate information.” Despite that resolute posture, on February 23, 2017 the Argentina Union Conference released a statement reporting that Carlos Gill was among five denominational leaders that have resigned; others were two university officers, Ramos and de Sousa Matia, union conference treasurer Carlos Gimenez and Roberto Giacchini, legal representative for the union conference.

The resignation of a nucleus of the SDA administrative leadership of the university and the union conference, including legal counsel does not support the claim of innocence. Indeed, if the anonymous tipster is on track, smuggling has been practiced for “years”.

This story raises the following questions:

Over the years of smuggling has SDA administrative leadership claimed some items, such as televisions, computers, professional film equipment, and drones, for personal use?

The five SDA administrative leaders resigned under a cloud of alleged malfeasance. In the future will they surface somewhere in the SDA world field in SDA institutions as leading administrators?

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 community through conversation
SPECTRUM

Adventist Leaders in Argentina Detained for Allegedly Smuggling Millions in Electronic Goods

22 September 2016 | JARED WRIGHT



Leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Argentina have been detained for

allegedly smuggling some \$15,000,000 Argentine Pesos (\$991,000 USD) worth of goods into the country. A sting operation ordered by federal judge Adrián González Charvay targeted eight locations, apprehending six suspects, including leaders from the Argentina Union Conference.

[Última Noticia: Líderes adventistas en Argentina son arrestados por supuesto contrabando millonario de bienes electrónicos \(leer en español por Café Hispano\).](#)

According to [a report in La Nación](#), Argentina's leading conservative daily newspaper, crates came into Argentina from the United States said to be containing donated medical equipment and hand tools. Customs authorities instead discovered millions of Pesos worth of modern televisions, computers, tablets, smartphones, professional film equipment, music consoles and drones.

Judge González Charvay, who presided over a two-month investigation of the contraband, ordered an appraisal of the smuggled goods. Experts who examined the containers found expired hospital supplies in poor condition (some apparently used and potentially infectious) along with undeclared electronic merchandise totaling an estimated fifteen million Pesos. The smuggled goods represented a value of some \$6,000,000 Pesos (\$396,400 USD) in unpaid import fees.

On Thursday detectives from the Federal Crimes Department of the Argentine Federal Police conducted eight raids and apprehended six individuals, including as yet unnamed leaders of the Adventist Church in Argentina. The Argentina Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was the named recipient of the shipment, according to media reports.

Spectrum received an anonymous tip on August 10 about the Adventist Church's involvement in international smuggling. An email from uapleaks@gmail.com, signed by "John Doe" provided the following:

Dear Mr. Wright,

I write to you regarding something that is going on at River Plate Adventist

University (UAP, for its Spanish acronym), the Church's university in Argentina. For years, the UAP's authorities (the president, and two or three of his closest collaborators) have been committing smuggling on behalf of the UAP. The procedure is simple: they import some real donations from the US, but in the same container they add some purchases that get into our country without paying the due taxes (quite expensive over here). Over the last years, they have been becoming more and more dared.



Screen capture from Argentine news broadcast. The headline reads, "Raids on the Adventist Church: Donations from the USA Investigated."

. Last time, the CIO of the university (a systems engineer) travelled to the US for a couple of weeks just to buy electronic products. All of this could be just anecdotal, amid a general corrupt environment (both inside and outside the Church), if the media had not crossed on the road. A few days ago one container coming from the US was intercepted by Argentine custom officials. It supposedly contained donations, but inside the container there were all kind of products (mainly

electronics) valued in about \$400,000 USD.

The information provided in that email and subsequent correspondence from the same source correlated with initial reports of contraband seizure, published in La Nacion, but could not be independently verified by Spectrum. There was nothing in media reports confirming the involvement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until today.

When asked whether there were documentation of the involvement of personnel at River Plate Adventist University with the Argentina Adventist Union, “John Doe” stated,

“There is no emails related to the issue; at least none that I have seen. The Argentine Conference (Unión Argentina, UA) order to the UAP leaders was keep a strict public silence regarding the issue. They are doing so. However, there have been some personal meetings to share information with a list of middle managers.”

Later, in response to questions about which leaders might be involved, John Doe wrote the following:

Despite some information shared with the college's government bodies, the importat operations were managed by a small group of people. The university president, Oscar Ramos, is the main (and in many cases, the only) decision maker. Nothing is done without his knowledge and approval. He takes this issue under his personal care. Jorge De Sousa is the Vice President for Institutional Development. He is in charge of fundraising. Therefore, he spends several months every year in the U.S., he gets the donations, and he is the responsible for bringing them into Argentina. Nestor Pereyra is the university CIO, and one of the closer advisors of President Ramos, even in matters beyond IT. He makes decisions concerning technology purchasing, and in the particular case of the containers, he traveled to the U.S. for a couple of weeks to buy technology items. Then those items were loaded into the containers and introduced to the country as donations. Now, as they manage this issue with secrecy, is difficult to know what is the specific participation of each one in the case. On the other hand, the importation were

made using the name of the Church's legal entity in Argentina (Asociación Argentina de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día, AAASD), and not the university's legal entity (Asociación Colegio Adventista del Plata, ACAP). So the person legally responsible is the president of AAASD, Pastor Carlos Gill. I have no way of knowing how much President Gill knew about this. Of course he is now aware of everything.

Those claims concerning potential complicity have not been independently verified; no names of Adventist leaders have been reported as of this article's publication. However, all information provided by the anonymous source corresponds with what has so far been made public.

Late Thursday, the Argentina Union Conference [issued a press release](#) on Facebook with the text, “Official Communiqué of the Adventist Church in Argentina,” denying any wrongdoing:

Press Release

In relation to the facts that are public knowledge, the Argentina Association of Seventh-day Adventists (AAASD) said that its executives will be present before the judge in charge of the investigation in the next few hours. There actually exists a donation from the Adventist Church in the United States. Our entity is entitled to a court case and its managers and employees have attended and participated in the preliminary evidence gathering jointly with customs personnel. The unexpected judicial measure became impossible, as they were at the time of the procedures in their respective administrative offices, for their usual routines locked outside the office.

The donation included a wide variety of items, whose diversity pertains to its use in The River Plate Adventist University for training students from various departments which integrate those items--particularly in the department of health sciences, with careers such as medicine and others.

Concerning our commitment to receiving the contents, it was in accordance with a letter that in no way falls outside the laws for imports or any other activity. For these reasons, at present we are primarily interested in collaborating with the justice system to clarify this situation.

We will supply more information to the media and the public here as necessary.

Contact: Mr. Santiago Lopez Blasco - Director of Communication.

(Translated from Spanish)

Update One: [Jorge De Sousa Matías Arrested for Alleged Involvement In Smuggling Enterprise.](#)

Update Two: [Adventist Church in Argentina Counters Smuggling Charges](#)

Jared Wright is Managing Editor of SpectrumMagazine.org.



Leaders of the Adventist Church in Argentina Resign After Accusations by Authorities



February 23, 2017: Two major news organizations in Argentina published stories last Friday (February 17) about criminal charges against leaders of the Adventist denomination that have been rumored since last summer. “Millions in contraband by Adventist Church: How did they pull it off?” was the headline on the Infobae online news service. The same story was published in the La Nacion newspaper.

Journalists reported that in July, 2016, customs officials opened a container of donated items addressed to River Plate Adventist University and found “a megashipment of high-value, sophisticated electronics ... falsely labeled in order to evade import taxes.” The news story reported that Pastor Jorge de Sousa Matias, vice president for development at the university, was caught on a wire tap saying, “we are in trouble ... for three days they have been opening it box by box.” And four days later in another phone call, “We’re looking into the possibility of approaching an influential politician about this.” Not long thereafter de Sousa Matias was arrested.

Last Sabbath (February 18), Pastor Carlos Gill, president of the Argentina Union Conference, released a video on Facebook and YouTube explaining the

situation. He said that the denomination would contest the charges filed by a judge because they included “omissions ... exaggerations [and] inaccurate information.” Gill also stated that de Sousa Matias and Dr. Oscar Ramos, the university president, had resigned. He stated that both the Argentina Union Conference and the denomination’s South American Division had appointed committees to investigate the situation. But he did not say that the denomination was innocent, nor did he admit that it had committed a crime, leaving that basic question ambiguous. His closing prayer on the video asked God to “clean” the denomination.

The next day the video was removed. In the short time it was available, it received many negative responses and bitter comments.

Today the Argentina Union Conference released a statement with a report on a meeting of its governing body yesterday (February 22). A total of five denominational leaders have resigned; the two university officers, Ramos and de Sousa Matia, and Gill, union conference treasurer Carlos Gimenez and Roberto Giacchini, legal representative for the union conference. The resignations “will allow [the named individuals to] meet all the requirements of justice,” the statement said.

The union conference executive committee appointed a new president and treasurer. Dr. Dario Caviglione, president of the Central Argentine Conference, was appointed union conference president. Raul Kahl, treasurer of the South Argentine Conference, was appointed union conference treasurer.

“The Church profoundly regrets this situation that affects our faith community and the Argentinean society, since it supports ethical and moral values based on the Bible, which promote compliance with the laws,” the statement concluded. “It reaffirms its cooperation with the authorities.”

There are more than 150,000 Adventists in Argentina, a nation with 44 million residents. There are more than a thousand local congregations, as well as the university, a college, 15 secondary schools, three hospitals and six radio stations.