



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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