

First civilian sentenced for Argentina Dirty War crimes BBC 19 December 2012 A court in Argentina has sentenced former minister Jaime Smart to life in prison for crimes against humanity during the 1976-1983 military rule.

Smart is the first civilian to be sentenced for crimes against humanity committed during the "Dirty War".

He and 22 other defendants were found guilty of involvement in the torture and murder of opposition activists at illegal detention centres.

Smart was the interior minister for Buenos Aires province from 1976-1979.

The former chief of the investigative police in Buenos Aires, Miguel Etchecolatz, was also sentenced to life in prison.

He is already serving a life sentence for kidnap, torture and murder imposed in 2006.

As his sentence was read out, Etchecolatz held up a sign accusing the justice system of corruption. (...)

Earlier he had said he could get no justice as he was a "prisoner of war".

Torture centres

The court investigated crimes committed against almost 200 opponents of the military regime in six illegal detention centres in Buenos Aires.

Among the crimes investigated was the kidnapping of Jacobo Timerman, father of current Argentine Foreign Minister Hector Timerman.

Jacobo Timerman, then-editor of the left-leaning newspaper La Opinion, was subjected to electric shocks, beatings and solitary confinement in the two-and-a-half years he was illegally held.

Prosecutor Hernan Schapiro said Jaime Smart played a key role in the persecution of

opponents of the military regime in Buenos Aires province.

He said Smart formed part of the highest echelons of government during the most virulent years of the fight against what were viewed as subversives by the junta.

"The illegal detention centres were run in police stations under his command," Mr Schapiro said.

During the seven-year military rule, an estimated 30,000 people were kidnapped, tortured and killed by the junta.

Following the return to civilian rule in 1983, some leading members of the military were tried but then granted amnesties.

More than 20 years on, the amnesties were ruled unconstitutional, clearing the way for trials to resume. (...)

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