

## **Annan Chooses Former Political Prisoner as His First Special Adviser on Genocide**

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Secretary-General Kofi Annan informed the United Nations Security Council today that he has chosen a human rights advocate, lawyer and former political prisoner from Argentina as his first Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Juan E. Méndez is currently the President of the International Centre for Transitional Justice, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that helps countries emerging from conflict or misrule to make human rights violators accountable for their crimes.

In a letter to the Council President for July, Ambassador Mihnea Ioan Motoc of Romania, the Secretary-General outlined the mandate of the Special Adviser position.

Mr. Méndez's role will be to act as an early-warning mechanism to the Secretary-General and the Security Council about potential situations that could develop into genocide, and to make recommendations to the Council about how the UN can prevent these events.

His appointment follows a pledge by Mr. Annan earlier this year, as the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide neared, to designate an official to collect data and monitor any serious violations of human rights or international law that have a racial or ethnic dimension and could lead to genocide.

Mr. Méndez, 59, served as a lawyer for political prisoners in the 1970s before Argentina's military junta jailed him twice for his activities. During this period Amnesty International adopted him as a "Prisoner of Conscience."

After moving to the United States following his release from detention, Mr. Méndez worked for Human Rights Watch for 15 years, specializing in Western Hemisphere issues.

In addition, he has worked for other NGOs and as an academic, most recently teaching law at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, United States, where he also headed the campus Center for Civil and Human Rights.

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