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ARGENTINA | Attempted Murder of Baptist Pastor

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for a full investigation and charges to be brought against those responsible for the attempted murder of Baptist Pastor Marcelo Nieva in Río Tercero, Cordoba Province, Argentina on Oct. 21.

Pastor Nieva, who leads the Pueblo Grande Baptist Church that works with victims of domestic violence, sex trafficking and drug addicts, was shot at multiple times while driving in Río Tercero on the evening of Oct. 21 along with church member Daniel Carreño. They were not wounded.

A group of national and provincial Baptist leaders in Argentina have expressed alarm at the attack, pointing out that the attempted murder of the pastor is the latest and most severe instance in a pattern of threats and harassment against him. In a joint statement, the group, which includes the Argentinian Evangelical Baptist Convention and the Association of Evangelical Baptists Churches of the Province of Cordoba, directly accused “narco-trafficking linked assassins who have infiltrated the Cordoba Police and out of revenge [have targeted him] because of his pastoral work and the earlier complaint he filed about them to the Federal Court of Cordoba.”

Dr. Alejandro Zeverin Escribano, the lawyer representing Pastor Nieva, indicated that the Federal Court of Cordoba immediately ordered the pastor and Carreño be assigned federal guards for their protection. He pointed out that the new protection order followed a Federal Court order this summer to provide the church with round the clock protection. Dr. Zeverin Escribano expressed concern that the protection order did not go far enough and echoed calls for a full investigation and the prosecution of those responsible for the campaign of harassment, attacks and recent murder attempt.

Pastor Nieva received national and international support last year when charges were brought against him under “anti-cult” legislation adopted on the provincial level. Argentinian denominational leaders and legal experts criticized the vaguely written anti-cult law used to target the church, which belongs to a denomination with a 105-year history in the country. They told CSW they believe the pastor was targeted by corrupt politicians and members of the local police force because of the church’s work with victims of sex trafficking and drug addicts.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We were disturbed to receive news of the attempted murder of Pastor Marcelo Nieva and the attack on his vehicle while he was driving with a member of his church. This is the culmination of a long campaign of harassment and attacks on Pastor Nieva and his church, and we are concerned that impunity will only embolden those responsible. We thank the Argentinian Federal Government for the protection it has assigned to Pastor Neiva and the church, but call on government officials to do more to ensure that these kinds of attacks do not happen again. We also call on the government to repeal the

anti-cult legislation which has been manipulated to target this pastor and church and constitutes a serious threat to freedom of religion or belief in Argentina.”