

Santiago Maldonado's Family Confirms Body is Missing Argentinean Activist



Buenos Aires, October 21 (RHC)-- The family of missing Argentinean activist Santiago Maldonado have confirmed that a body found in the Chubut River earlier this week is their son's.

His brother Sergio told the media outside the morgue in Buenos Aires that they were able to make the identification by the markings and tattoos on the remains. "We were able to look at the body, ...we recognized the tattoos. We are convinced that it is Santiago," Sergio said.

He added: "This does not mean that the Gendarmerie (police) is not responsible. We are going to continue the investigation to know the truth and to have justice".

The autopsy is underway and Sergio said the DNA tests are expected "within a few days."

Later on the family's Facebook page, a message was posted which said: "There is very little we can say about our feelings after the confirmation... This pain does not know words... The circumstances of the body's discovery give us many doubts... We need to know what happened to Santiago and who is responsible for his death. All of them. Not only those who took his life but those who, by action or

omission, collaborated in the cover-up and obstructed the search process."

It also called for political forces to "make the greatest effort to support and guarantee all actions to help us find the Truth and obtain Justice. The death of Santiago should not be the subject of divisions or interests. No one has the right to cause further pain to this family, for which we ask respect."

28-year-old Santiago disappeared on August 1st and an unidentified body was found in the area where he disappeared on Tuesday.

The remains were discovered caught in the branches of willow trees on the Chubut river, about 1,500 meters from the community guard of the Indigenous Mapuche community in Pu Lof, near Esquel. The activist went missing there shortly after he was arrested during a demonstration in support of Argentina's Indigenous Mapuche community.

The protest in Patagonia was part of a long-running dispute between Benetton, the Italian clothing retailer that owns 2.2 million acres of land, and the Indigenous people who claim part of the territory.

According to witnesses, the rally was interrupted by the federal police forces. One participant and community member, Matias Santana, claimed to have seen officers force Maldonado into a vehicle after knocking him unconscious.

On Wednesday, the family's lawyer questioned why the body had only been found this week after three other unsuccessful dredging attempts. "We have no explanation of why the other results were negative and this is positive."

Sergio Maldonado also asked why the body had been found upstream, in a previously checked area. He tweeted that he thought the remains could have been planted there.

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