

VI. 4 Apr 85

P A R A G U A Y

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHODS EXEMPTION 3020
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT 1
DATE 2000 2006

STROESSNER DISCUSSES MENGELE WITH U.S. ABC NEWS

PY030057 Asuncion Red Privada de Teledifusora Paraguaya Television in Spanish 0000 GMT
1 Apr 85

[Interview with President Alfredo Stroessner by U.S. ABC News reporters Frank Manitzas, John Martin, and Collin Scott Willie at Government House on 29 March; all questions in English -- recorded]

[Excerpts] [Reporter] Mr President, we are pleased and respectful of the opportunity to speak with you about a subject that I know has caused some discomfort in this country, because we know that you can help us clear up the mystery of the whereabouts of Joseph Mengele. There have been so many reports over the years that he is here, he is there, that he is in various parts of the world. Can you tell us, can you give us some information? Is he here in Paraguay?

[Stroessner] Well, I am very pleased to receive you, and I will gladly answer your questions. It is also very necessary that you get in touch with the people's sectors, government officials, and foreign personalities who are... [Stroessner hesitates] discharging their duties here in Paraguay.

I can tell you that I am in permanent contact with the people, although it is not necessary to point this out. I am trying to meet their needs and their aspirations for progress, and particularly their aspirations for peace.

Now, getting to your question. Both in the United States and in Paraguay there have been questions about Mengele since 1967. All the information on the case has already been released. I cannot tell you anything new. The president of the Supreme Court and other government officials have spoken about it on several occasions. According to information I have at hand, Mengele came to Paraguay around 1962 with legal documents issued by the German Embassy in his own name. And then, in search of these charges... [rephrases] We do not know where he is. That's all I can say. On several occasions... [Stroessner hesitates] there have been comments even about this lady who came from the United States not long ago... [rephrases] the same thing, eh? [Stroessner unsuccessfully tries to correctly pronounce the name Karsfeld three times] ...Well.

Now, according to information released by the U.S. Embassy, she will run for a New York Senate seat, and she was reportedly more interested in promoting her candidacy than in looking into the issue that she was here to investigate.

[Reporter] So, if I understand you correctly, Mr President, Dr Mengele is not here. Do you have any information when he was here last?

[Stroessner, interrupting interpreter] No, I do not know that. This is what I can tell you. We have given all the necessary explanations. I personally had no information nor was I aware of the issue.

[Reporter] Did you ever meet him when he was here?

[Stroessner] No, absolutely not, not at all, absolutely not.

[Reporter] Do your records show when he left here, what year, what day, or is there anything you think could help us understand about that?

Mengele

[Stroessner] First of all, the courts have taken care of the issue. You can imagine that I have so many obligations and duties to discharge and issues to deal with in my capacity as president... [rephrases] The police and the courts must undoubtedly deal with such issues. I have the impression... [rephrases] such repeated questions give the impression that something is being concealed, but it is not so. It appears that something is being concealed, something about which there is an intention of keeping silent. There is nothing of the sort.

[Reporter] We know you want to tell the truth and that is why we have come, so that we may hear the truth. We appreciate the cooperation you have [words indistinct] in meeting with the judiciary and the president of the Supreme Court. It is clear that you wish...

[Stroessner, interrupting] I always say that... [Stroessner hesitates] it is always good to tell the truth no matter how bitter it may be, and that a lie is always bad no matter how elegant it may be. I am not a friend of deception.

[Reporter] Mr President, why do you suppose there have been so many reports over the years, so many news reports about the presence of Mengele?

[Stroessner] Now, look. There are, and we are sure of... [rephrases] We may draw our own conclusions. There may be people who want to know his whereabouts and therefore they go to the press, and there you have the results. We always read sensational reports and we are attracted by unusual news.

[Reporter] We want to inform our readers [as heard] again that what you have told us is extremely useful, the thing that you have suggested, that is, speaking with the Justice Department and the courts. Is there anyone else here in Paraguay who could help us prove that he is no longer here, perhaps some of his friends from... [question overlapped by interpreter]

[Stroessner] I believe those are the regular channels to go through to inquire about this issue, which has been in the news for years, because it is a repeated, and repeated, and continuously repeated issue. We have to put an end to it, or whatever, and consider that all questions have been properly answered.

[Reporter] That's exactly what we hope to help the people in our country understand. In the investigation in search for Dr Mengele that has begun now in the United States and in the FRG again, do you expect to give full cooperation, full collaboration with those [words indistinct]?

[Stroessner] We have always had that attitude. We are always and [words indistinct]. No, but we do not know more than what we already said.

[Reporter] I have only one final question. If you should by chance discover that Dr Mengele has returned to Paraguay, would you have him arrested and extradited to the FRG?

[Stroessner, overlapping interpreter] And you should then... [rephrases] you should give us advice. We cannot deal with hypotheses. No... [Stroessner stutters] Action will be taken in keeping with the circumstances. If... [Stroessner hesitates]

[Reporter] And if the situation was that he has returned, you would have him arrested?

[Stroessner, without waiting for interpreter] Just as you ask me what will happen if he comes here, he may also be in the United States, he may be held there. Yes. Look, I am not a clairvoyant.

[Reporter] I understand, and if he were found in the United States, the U.S. Government has said it would arrest him and extradite to the FRG. You would do the same here if he secretly returned here?

[Stroessner] Look, I will speak sincerely. I don't know where he is. We cannot know whether he is here, or in the United States, or in any other country.

[Reporter] But my question is if he was discovered here, if he had returned without your knowledge or without the knowledge of the country, he would be arrested. Is that correct?

[Stroessner] Look, this is a hypothesis. If that ever happens, we will take the corresponding measures, in keeping with the international treaties.

[Reporter] Thank you very much.

[Stroessner] It is not always possible to take action before the actual event takes place.

[Reporter] But you are prepared to take if it happens?

[Stroessner] And what if we suppose that he is dead and that he cannot move, that he cannot return?

[Reporter] Do you think he is dead?

[Stroessner, without waiting for interpreter] Now, everyone knows that he had legal documents. We were not aware of his arrival, not even I myself was aware of it nor how long he was here in Paraguay. Every now and then we repeat the same answers... [corrects himself] we ask the same questions, yes.

[Reporter] I understand...

[Stroessner, interrupting] I am sure that I will be asked about this subject when I visit the FRG.

[Reporter] Do you expect to make a gesture in the FRG, perhaps place flowers as many statesmen do at the graves of victims of Nazism?

[Stroessner] I do not know the details of the agenda. Right now I should undoubtedly be worrying about the problems in Paraguay, and that is precisely what I am doing. I have great responsibilities after so many wars, because Paraguay has waged many wars which have hindered our development and reduced our territory because we have been amputated. I am very busy taking care of the country's needs and of maintaining its position and developing it even more. I have read about all the wars that the world has endured, and I know quite a lot about this subject, about the wars in Europe, Asia, and even in America...

[Reporter, interrupting] And you have never met Dr Mengele in the country?

[Stroessner] I want you to leave convinced that you have not come here to interrogate me in order to get some information about Mengele. I find that very unpleasant, because I have greater concerns. The people have elected me to govern on several occasions so you can imagine that a problem concerning another continent can hardly concern me more than the problems of my country. You give the impression that you have come to interrogate me in order to obtain information. I have already said much too much.

[Reporter] I certainly did not wish to do that. I just wanted our viewers in America to know for all time the exact truth.

[Stroessner] Look, these people such as (Rudel), (?although he is unknown), who went to Argentina, came to Paraguay for commercial reasons, this is not secret. Scorzeny has also been here for commercial reasons. Scorzeny and (Rudel) used to travel to the United States and other places. Scorzeny rescued Benito Mussolini from the Gran Sasso. You must know the story.

[Reporter] He rescued Mussolini?

[Stroessner] Yes, as I was saying, Scorzeny was here. I even met him here. He came for commercial reasons.

[Reporter] Well, we thank you very much for helping us...

[Stroessner, interrupting] Now then, (Rudel) was not in very good health. You must have seen him here on television with a wooden leg. Did you know that?

[Reporter] No I didn't.

[Stroessner] Yes, he wore a wooden leg. You could see him around when he was here. Let us hope that another story about (Rudel) will not be made up.

[Reporter] Do you think that the Mengele question will ever finally go away?

[Stroessner] Look, if they want to continue with that story let them continue, but what information can they obtain from me? I do not want to appear on a television network that includes 240 stations, on ABC News, as though I am standing trial. I am the president of Paraguay, elected by the people, and on 1 April -- since you will still be here -- you can hear my speech in which I will disclose the results of the last elections, although with this I will be stealing quite a bit of your time.

[Reporter] We are happy to give your answers as you gave them directly and forthrightly, and do not wish to accuse you of any (?event).

[Stroessner] We have a U.S. Embassy here with which we have always maintained a good relationship, also with Ambassador Davis and the embassy personnel. We are brother nations.

[Reporter] We understand that and we...

[Stroessner, interrupting] We are exercising a government free of communism. We do not have a deficit because of democracy. Undoubtedly, it is the result of problems that have happened in other parts of the world and if Mengele went to Argentina and came here, the country is not to blame for that. It should be made very clear to all U.S. television viewers that this country is not to blame for that.

[Reporter] Thank you very much.

[Stroessner] Very well, thank you very much. Is there anything else that you would like to know. Let us not just talk about Mengele, because this subject is becoming like a scratched record: It never stops. The trouble is that they have come so often and still do not seem to be satisfied.

[Reporter to interpreter] You may tell him that we are satisfied that he has answered all our questions.

[Stroessner] We all know how all this happened. I could list the events in chronological order. Now then, I do not always only seek to investigate the causes and learn about events that have taken place. What should concern us now is what could happen.

[Reporter] In the future?

[Stroessner] That is right, what could happen in the world, because wars do not always solve our problems, many times they only extend them. It is said that it is the story of something that has already happened and that no one will be able to modify, but the investigations regarding this story continue to be conducted and the story is constantly modified. Some say they are dead, some that they are alive. It is true, the story is being constantly modified, but sometimes one cannot modify what has happened.

[Reporter] That is why we are especially grateful to you for...

[Stroessner, interrupting] In other words, the generations are born, then they die and are replaced by new generations. Sorry, what were you saying? Well, I think we are back to square one again.

[Reporter] Thank you again, I think we have enough.

[Stroessner] Very well.