



Mental Disability Rights International

People with Psychiatric Diagnoses Form First Advocacy Organization in Argentina

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"It is time for mental health users to have our own voice."

- Agustina Vidal, Co-Founder (PAMHSU)

Patients, ex-patients, and users of Argentina's mental health system met recently to found the **Permanent Assembly of Mental Health System Users (Asamblea Permanente de Usuarios del Sistema de Salud Mental)**. The Assembly is the first independently-run psychiatric patient advocacy group in the country's history and the only voice of its kind. "We want the world to know that we are not useless people," said co-founder Carlos Moretti. "We want to speak up for our human rights."



Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI) and the **Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)** brought the group together and is continuing to support its development by providing technical assistance and other resources to ensure its success. The Permanent Assembly will demand greater rights protection and representation in mental health policy formulation from the government. In addition, the group plans to organize self-help initiatives and alternatives to institutional care, which they characterize as "punitive."

The country's mental health policies recently came under sharp scrutiny in the MDRI/CELS joint report, **"Ruined Lives: Segregation from Society in Argentina's Psychiatric Asylums,"** released 2007. The report denounces abuses and mistreatment in Argentina's asylums as "widespread." It is estimated that 25,000 people are currently detained in Argentina's psychiatric asylums, most in institutions with more than 1,000 beds.