

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Media Briefing

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## Chile: The "Esmeralda" torture ship

The Chilean naval training ship "Esmeralda" (Buque Escuela "Esmeralda") makes yearly training voyages visiting ports around the world acting as a "roving" embassy for Chile. In April of this year the "Esmeralda" embarked on its 48th training voyage, with plans to call at ports in Latin America and Europe, including Germany, France, the UK and Spain. These voyages have taken place both during the military government and in the years since the return to civilian rule.

Over the years, as part of Amnesty International's work against the gross human rights violations committed in Chile during the military government, the organization has documented and published a number of testimonies of victims tortured on the "Esmeralda". One of the victims of torture on the "Esmeralda" was a British-Chilean priest, Michael Woodward. He died as a result of the torture he was subjected to by members of the security forces on board the "Esmeralda".

In recent years, there has been considerable international interest in the "Esmeralda" and on Chile in general by the media due to the detention and extradition proceedings in the United Kingdom in 1998 against Augusto Pinochet.

To date thousands of victims of torture during the period of the military government who survived their ordeal have not been acknowledged by the authorities and are still asking for official recognition and justice, including those who were victims of torture on the Esmeralda. The Chilean government and high ranking navy officials have continued to deny that naval ships and installations were used as torture centres.

Amnesty International is urging the Chilean government and the Chilean navy to acknowledge the serious human rights violations committed on the "Esmeralda"; to conduct independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture and other human rights violations on navy installations and vessels during the military government; to bring the perpetrators to justice and to morally and materially compensate the victims and their families.

Initiatives by successive civilian governments, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the National Reparation and Reconciliation Corporation and the Chilean Human Rights Discussion Table, all created to deal with Chile's serious legacy of human right violations, have not included the grave crime of torture which in Chile was widespread and systematic during the years of military government.

## Background

It has been expressly recognized since 1975, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration

for the Protection of All persons from being subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, that all states must conduct prompt and impartial investigations of all complaints of torture. In addition, Chile, as a party to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment since 1988, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights since 1972, is legally bound to conduct prompt and impartial investigations. Moreover, the widespread and systematic use of torture constitutes a crime against humanity and is therefore not subject to the statute of limitations under international law.

**For more information, please see *Chile:Torture and the naval training ship the "Esmeralda"*:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr22062003>**

Public Document

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