

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

4 December 2001

AI Index: AMR 22/018/2001

Chile: Human Rights Day -- Another day without knowing the truth about the "disappeared"

*"I am ready to forgive, but I need to know who I have to forgive. If they would just speak up and acknowledge what they have done, they would be giving us the opportunity to forgive. It would be more noble if they were to do that. There will be reconciliation only if there is justice."
(relative of Chilean "disappeared")*

As the world marks Human Rights Day today, Amnesty International paid tribute to the courage, endurance and tireless struggle of the relatives of the over 1,000 men, women and children who "disappeared" during Chile's military rule.

"Year after year, the relatives and friends of the "disappeared" have lived with the constant pain of not knowing what happened to their loved ones. Until their questions are answered, and until they see justice done, their wounds -- and the wounds of Chilean society -- will not heal," Amnesty International said.

Following Augusto Pinochet's arrest in London in October 1998, the struggle against impunity in Chile has gained new impetus, the debate on the right of relatives to truth and justice has been rekindled and various judicial initiatives have been set underway to address the legacy of past human rights violations. These include the investigations by judge Juan Guzmán Tapia and the appointment of special judges to investigate "disappearances".

"It is essential to build on these initial advances to push for judicial results and for the dismantling of all the obstacles that have so far prevented the relatives from knowing what happened to their loved ones and seeing those responsible brought to justice," Amnesty International said.

Continuing the campaign that Amnesty International has maintained through the long years since the initial human rights violations were recorded in 1973, the organization's members worldwide are today redoubling their efforts in support of anti-impunity initiatives and of the ongoing quest for truth and justice.

"The repeal of the 1978 Amnesty Law -- which has institutionalised impunity for the serious human rights violations committed during Augusto Pinochet's time in power -- is the first essential step to achieve this," the organization stressed.

"Breaking the cycle of impunity, uncovering the truth and ensuring full justice is the only way to finally put an end to the suffering of the relatives of the 'disappeared' -- suffering which has been recognised as being tantamount to torture -- and to prevent such serious violations from happening again," Amnesty International concluded.

*****Amnesty International published today a document summarizing the events following the arrest of Augusto Pinochet, and charting the main human rights developments in the recent years. The document also details the cases of 22 "disappeared" people. For a copy of the report, please call the Amnesty International press office in London, on +44 207 413 5562/5566***

Background

The two commissions, the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, CNVR, National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation and its successor the Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación, CNRR, National Corporation of Reparation and Reconciliation that were set up by the civilian government of President Patricio Aylwin, recorded the "disappearance", extrajudicial execution or death under torture of 3,197 people between 1973 and 1990.

After more than twenty five years, the issue of impunity with regard to the serious human rights violations committed under military rule, remains unresolved. There has been some progress in the courts, but these advances are undermined by the continued use of the 1978 Amnesty Law to close cases without proper investigation and by the largely unfettered power of the military courts. Besides the legal restraints, there are also political and institutional obstacles that need to be addressed if those responsible for human rights violations are to be held to account.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>