

United Kingdom : Time for cooperation against impunity in Chile has come

General Pinochet's presence in the United Kingdom is giving British authorities a unique opportunity to cooperate in the fight against impunity for human rights violations committed in Chile during his rule, Amnesty International said today.

"The *commissio rogatoire* (official petition) filed by the Spanish judges to interrogate General Augusto Pinochet in the United Kingdom must be granted," the organization urged.

"This would be a clear manifestation of the British Government's commitment to human rights and of its willingness to cooperate with a request by the judiciary from a European Community member State in human rights matters."

Amnesty International is urging the British authorities to cooperate with the Spanish judges, Manuel García-Castellón and Baltasar Garzón, in the request filed within the frame of investigations initiated by the Spanish National High Court (*Audiencia Nacional*) into cases of victims of serious human rights violations.

"The British authorities cannot ignore the gravity of the human rights violations committed in Chile under the government of General Pinochet," Amnesty International added.

"The only way to show this acknowledgement to relatives, victims and the international community is by responding positively to the request for assistance by the Spanish courts, thus effectively cooperating in the struggle for truth and justice."

The British authorities are obliged under international law to cooperate with the Spanish judicial authorities. This obligation arises from the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism of 27 January 1977-- to which both Spain and the United Kingdom are States party -- establishing the cooperation to take effective measures to ensure that the perpetrators of kidnappings or serious unlawful detentions do not benefit from impunity.

Equally, international cooperation and mutual assistance to investigate crimes against humanity has been acknowledged as a principle by the United Nations in its resolution 3074 (XXVIII) of 3 December 1973.

Background

The human rights violations recorded in Chile during the government of General Augusto Pinochet (1973 to 1990) -- which include thousands of cases of torture, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance" -- constitute crimes against humanity. These crimes were committed by the intelligence services -- Directorate of National Intelligence (DINA) and the National Information Centre (CNI)-- which reported to President Augusto Pinochet.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Comisión Rettig*) -- which has extensively documented the human rights violations committed during the dictatorship -- stated that these crimes were committed through the practice of State terrorism.

Under the Organic Law of the Judiciary, Spanish courts are empowered to pursue the crimes of genocide and terrorism.

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