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Chile: 40 years on from Pinochet's coup impunity must end

Thousands of torture survivors and relatives of those disappeared during General Augusto Pinochet's brutal regime are still being denied truth, justice and reparation, Amnesty International said today on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the day he seized power.

In a petition signed by thousands of activists, the organization is calling on the Chilean authorities to put an end to all obstacles protecting the perpetrators of human rights violations in the country.

"It is not acceptable that 40 years after the military coup the search for justice, truth and reparation in Chile continues to be hampered. An amnesty law continues to shield human rights violators from prosecution, there are still long delays in judicial proceedings and sentences fail to reflect the severity of the crimes committed," said Guadalupe Marengo, Deputy Director at the Americas Programme, Amnesty International.

Tens of thousands of people were detained, tortured, killed or disappeared. The total number of people officially recognized as disappeared in Chile or killed between 1973 and 1990 stands at over 3,000 and survivors of political imprisonment and/or torture at around 40,000.

The Amnesty Decree Law, passed in 1978, excludes all individuals who committed human rights violations between 11 September 1973 and 10 March 1978 from criminal responsibility.

While some judicial decisions have circumvented the application of the amnesty law, its continued existence is incompatible with Chile's international human rights obligations.

"The Chilean authorities must tackle the legacy of serious and widespread abuses committed in the past, repeal the amnesty law immediately as its mere existence is a slap in the face to the thousands of victims of Pinochet's regime and their relatives, and ensure all human rights violations are dealt in ordinary courts," said Ana Piquer, Director of Amnesty International Chile.

To date, at least 262 individuals have been sentenced for human rights violations and there are more than 1,100 open judicial proceedings.

"It is mainly thanks to the continuous struggle of many of the victims and their families, and a few courageous prosecutors and judges, that some of those responsible for these crimes have been brought to Justice. It is time for the authorities to introduce all reforms needed to guarantee that such grave violations never happen again," said Guadalupe Marengo.

Background information

The armed forces headed by General Augusto Pinochet took power in Chile from the elected government of President Salvador Allende in a bloody military coup on 11 September 1973.

In recent years, the courts have not applied the amnesty law. However, its continued presence in the domestic law is incompatible with Chile's international human rights obligations.

In 1991 a National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report (Rettig Commission) documented 2,296 people were killed for political reasons, including almost a thousand cases of enforced disappearances. In 2004 and 2005 a National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture report (Valech Commission) found that over 28,459 people were arrested for political reasons and that most of them were victims of torture. The commission was reopened in 2010 to assess further cases of enforced disappearance, political killings, political imprisonment and torture. The total number of people officially recognized as disappeared in Chile or killed between 1973 and 1990 stands at 3,216 and survivors of political imprisonment and/or torture at 38,254.

Some positive progress has been made in recent years with the transfer of some judicial proceedings of crimes committed in the past from the military to the civilian courts to ensure greater independence and impartiality. However, military jurisdiction still applies to human rights violations committed by the military and the security forces.

For the past few months, Amnesty International has collected more than 25.000 signatures through [an online petition](#).

Amnesty International urges the Chilean authorities to repeal the 1978 Amnesty Decree Law and any other measures granting amnesty to perpetrators of human rights violations; to reform the Military Code of Justice to ensure that human rights abuses by military personnel and security forces in Chile are investigated and tried under the civilian courts; to support and strengthen the initiatives aimed at preserving the historical memory of the gross human rights violations and to put human rights at the forefront of all policies and programmes. The petition will remain active until the end of September.

The organization has published a series of features showing the brutality of the Pinochet's era:

["Pinochet was a stigma for Chile and the world"](#)

[Life under Pinochet: "I remember being shown some very severe signs of torture"](#)

[A cunning devil](#)

["We still don't know what happened to my brother"](#)

["The only thing we could hear were church bells and people screaming"](#)