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Chile: The quest for truth and justice -- a challenge for the new President

Establishing the truth about past human rights violations and bringing those responsible to justice must form a central component in the new President's program of government, Amnesty International said today on the eve of the inauguration of President Ricardo Lagos.

"Investigations of human rights violations committed during Augusto Pinochet's time in power must be vigorously pursued by the judiciary, and those responsible must be prosecuted," Amnesty International said.

"We encourage the new President to stand by his commitment to human rights, and to initiate action to remove all the legal obstacles that have so far institutionalized impunity in Chile," the organization said.

As a presidential candidate, Ricardo Lagos assured Amnesty International that promoting and strengthening respect for human rights in Chile would be "a very important component of [his] government program".

Concrete action proposed by Amnesty International includes annulling the 1978 Amnesty Law, excluding cases of human rights violations from the jurisdiction of military courts, adopting measures to lift parliamentary immunity protecting alleged perpetrators of human rights violations, and guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary.

"The new government should not introduce any legislation which could hinder the uncovering of the truth on violations committed by security agents and the prosecution of those responsible -- whatever their past or present status," the organization said.

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