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Chile: Concrete action needed to end torture

Prohibiting torture by law is not enough; concrete steps must be urgently taken to stop this horrendous practice from happening, said Amnesty International today on the eve of the UN Committee against Torture consideration of the third periodic report of Chile.

Even though during recent years the Chilean authorities have introduced a number of initiatives that seek to protect human rights, torture and ill-treatment are still reported in the country. Chile still fails to fully implement the obligations contained in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture) to which it is a State party.

Amongst those initiatives, is the creation of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, as a result of the human rights proposal made by President Ricardo Lagos in August 2003, to deal with the thousands of torture survivors from the years of military government.

"Amnesty International expects that all torture cases submitted to this National Commission will be examined and victims provided with the official recognition and reparation they have been awaiting over more than 20 years."

"Torture and ill-treatment is not only a matter of the past, it is still widespread in the country," said Amnesty International. "the steps taken by the Chilean government, like the reform of criminal procedure initiated in December 2000 and making torture a punishable offence under Chilean domestic law in 1998, must now be reinforced with concrete action if Chile is to eradicate torture."

An Amnesty International delegation which visited Chile in March 2003 found that prison conditions, including the problem of overcrowding, lead to torture and ill-treatment.

In January 2003, political prisoners held in Colina II Prison in the Metropolitan Region, were brutally beaten and drenched with water by members of the prison guard and the anti-riot squad known as the Grupo Especial Antimotines.

Torture has been also reported within the military itself. Reports have been received indicating that it is not unusual for recruits who are undergoing compulsory military service to be given punishments that amount to torture and ill-treatment. Cristóbal Auger Hinrichsen, a 19-year-old former cadet at the Military Academy, was allegedly subjected to ill-treatment by his superiors at the military Academy between February and March 2002. Cristóbal is now suffering from post-traumatic stress.

"It is vitally important that thorough and independent investigations are conducted into all complaints of torture, the methods of investigation and conclusion made public and those responsible brought to justice." said Amnesty International.

"The apparent inaction of the authorities in investigating reports of torture and ill-treatment gives the impression that such acts are tolerated and encourages their recurrence," added Amnesty International.

Background Information

On 10 and 11 May, the UN Committee against Torture will consider the third periodic report of Chile on the legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures taken by Chile to implement the UN Convention against Torture.

Amnesty International has submitted to the Committee against Torture a summary of its concerns relating to torture and ill-treatment in Chile.

Public Document

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