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Chile: Truth and justice must not be hindered

Amnesty International regrets that -- after a very long wait for the Chilean judiciary to deliver a decision on the Caravan of death cases -- the Santiago Court of Appeals has decided to suspend all charges against Augusto Pinochet.

According to press reports, charges against former President Augusto Pinochet were suspended "temporarily but indefinitely" as he was deemed unfit to stand trial.

Amnesty International expressed its frustration that, despite growing international consensus that Heads of State must not escape prosecution when they are accused of crimes against humanity, worldwide expectations of justice are often stalled by long and protracted proceedings.

"In this case, this means that the extremely serious charges against Pinochet related to the Caravan of Death may now never be heard, denying the possibility of a measure of justice to those who died and 'disappeared' during that operation, and to their families," the organization said.

Amnesty International has confided in the Chilean judicial authorities to finally give a judicial response to the quest for truth and justice pursued for over two decades by the relatives of the thousands of victims of human rights violations committed under Augusto Pinochet's rule. The organization hopes that the other judicial proceedings initiated with regards to such violations will continue, and lead to truth and justice for the victims and their relatives.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Chilean authorities to ensure that judicial proceedings in human rights cases are free of any political influence. During a visit to Chile in October 2000, the organization's Secretary General Pierre Sané received assurances to this effect from President Ricardo Lagos.

"Chile now has a responsibility to keep this promise and to move quickly to achieve justice for the thousands of families still waiting to find out what happened to their loved ones," Amnesty International said.

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