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Chile

Torturers Prosecuted

The Chilean government is apparently taking stronger measures to punish members of its security forces for abuses of human rights.

Secret military trials have resulted in convictions of military and police personnel charged with torturing—and in some cases killing—prisoners.

The top army commander for the Santiago region, General Rolando Osay, who also serves as military judge for the capital, has heard some cases and is preparing to hear others.

He apparently is being pressed by a group of army generals to explore with President Pinochet the possibility of publicizing some trials to demonstrate the administration's sincerity in safeguarding human rights.

Public knowledge of the trials would likely be well received abroad, where Chile's image has sharply declined because of the human rights situation. On the other hand, such knowledge could draw unwelcome attention to specific instances of power abuses that have taken place since the September 1973 coup.

Chilean officials may well be justified in their fears that outsiders might dig deeper into the evidence and uncover a web of officially condoned violations. Doing so could implicate some high-ranking members of the government as well as hurt the morale of security forces.

It is still too early to determine how far Pinochet will go to end maltreatment of prisoners, but word of the trials is likely to have some remedial effect as it filters through the security forces.

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