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UNCLASSIFIED

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CHILE

ISSUE:

Since the return to democracy, Chile continues to make sound progress in the field of human rights.

BACKGROUND:

Since it took office in 1990, President Aylwin's "Concertacion" coalition has released all but 65 of the 430 political prisoners inherited from the Pinochet Regime. It has taken major initiatives in the field of human rights and the situation has improved dramatically. The Government responded to a report on the victims of abuses by promising financial compensation and initiating judicial reform to facilitate, inter alia, the transfer of cases from the military to the civil courts. However, the coalition's failure to definitively resolve the issue of political prisoners after nearly two years in office is increasingly damaging to its image within a large sector of its traditional electorate. Two hunger strikes by political prisoners this year have driven home this point.

The President had committed his Government to resolving the issue of the remaining political prisoners prior to Christmas. However, reports now indicate that this may not happen. The Right has stated that releasing the political prisoners would mean the President was reneging on his earlier promise that those convicted of crimes of violence should remain in jail until they had served their full sentences. In response, Aylwin has observed that many crimes of violence have occurred in Chile for which the perpetrators remain immune and that he fully intends to make use of the powers granted him to pardon and or reduce the sentences of political prisoners. He observed that it is unjust that there have been arrests and trials on one side but not on the other. This may be changing. In September, two generals were arrested and charged in the 1976 assassination of former Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier and his assistant Ronni Moffitt. Appeal charges and a request for provisional liberty were rejected. In December, a former DINA¹ intelligence officer was charged with the kidnapping of left wing activists in 1973.

It is conceivable that the government might be preparing the country for the declaration of a general amnesty.

¹Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (Directorate of National Intelligence) was implicated in a large number of disappearances.