

Human Rights Situation in Chile

ISSUE:

Although some human rights violations persist in Chile, there has been major progress during the last year. Chile's peaceful return to democracy, as witnessed in the December 14 elections, creates an improved environment for human rights.

BACKGROUND:

In October, 1988, a national presidential plebiscite saw the rejection of military government and set in motion the return to democracy. The overwhelming public support (86%) for constitutional reforms in the July, 1989 referendum enhanced freedom of expression, the rule of law, and democratic rights. Most importantly, Chile's recent national elections, marked a peaceful return to democracy, and the constitutional reforms that lead to this transition, has created a new national environment, one likely to greatly enhance the protection of human rights.

A number of independent reports describe a gradual but significant improvement in human rights in Chile. The most recent report of the UN Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Chile, along with independent organizations in Chile that report human rights violations, such as the Chilean Human Rights Commission (CHRC), and the "Vicaria de la Solidaridad" (supported by the Catholic Church), all provide information showing that the human rights trend is positive regarding serious cases. As well, because of the improved climate in Chile since the October, 1988 referendum, there appears to be a greater willingness to report human rights violations than may have been the case in the past.

However, during 1989 some violations of human rights persisted. Of serious concern were violations suspected of being perpetrated by right-wing groups under the protection of the security forces. Despite its declining use, torture still persisted in 1989. Attacks on individual journalists in the latter part of the year also occurred at an alarming rate. There have also been a disturbing number of acts of random violence by political extremists.

The Canadian government has made clear its support of human rights in Chile through its meetings with Chilean human rights organizations, and in representations to the Chilean government. In international fora, it supported the UN resolution on the situation of human rights in Chile,