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C H I L E

POLITICAL KILLINGS: AUGUST 1984

On 23|4 August 1984, according to the Chilean authorities, nine people were shot dead in "confrontations" with security forces, three in Concepción, one in Los Angeles, three in Valdivia and two in Santiago. In seven cases, witnesses, relatives, prominent church figures, human rights organizations and others have expressed serious doubts about the official versions of the incidents. The information available to Amnesty International suggests that the seven may have been killed in circumstances other than those described by the authorities. In at least one case, the victim may have been arrested prior to being killed. In two others, many witnesses say they saw them shot while descending from a bus with their hands in the air, without offering any resistance.

The day after the killings, the Regional Military Governor for Santiago stated: "The confrontations which occurred last night, with the death of several extremists, are a preview of the energetic manner with which the security and public order forces will act to guarantee the safety of our people between now and the days of protest called for 4 and 5 September."

The Chilean Human Rights Commission, at a press conference, expressed their grave concern at the killings. "We could be witnessing a new and extraordinarily dangerous method of repression. There are many who are reaching the conclusion that these so-called confrontations are replacing other forms of repression which have been used in the past. The number of people who have died in so-called confrontations is increasing alarmingly."

The killings occurred only two weeks after a group of people, including a number of prominent church figures, organized a series of peaceful events on 9 August which they designated "Chile Defends Life". The events had been organized as a celebration of life, and to call for an end to the increasing number of deaths which have occurred, either during "Days of Protest", in alleged confrontations with security forces or other similar circumstances.

Amnesty International is concerned that over the past few years, a number of people have died in circumstances which suggest that they may have been killed while in the custody of security forces or deliberately sought out and shot dead by security forces in the street. Between May and July 1984, Amnesty International documented eight such deaths in which there were some grounds to doubt the official version given by the authorities. (See AMR 22|36|84: Political Killings: May, June, July 1984).

Although Amnesty International is not in a position to verify the conflicting accounts of the circumstances surrounding the deaths, it believes that these cases should be fully and independently investigated, and, in the event of extrajudicial executions found to have been committed, that those responsible be brought to justice. The organization is concerned that in the past, the judiciary has not thoroughly investigated such killings. Given the number of people who have allegedly died in circumstances different from

from those claimed by the authorities, it believes that all killings by security forces should be investigated by an independent body to establish the facts surrounding each case. In some cases in the past, though there have been doubts about the official version of the deaths, lack of concrete evidence and sometimes the fear of witnesses to come forward has prevented any action being taken before the courts.

The following is an account of the incidents which occurred on 23/4 August and which led to the deaths of seven people, giving both the official version of each death and the other statements which have cast doubts on the official version.

CONCEPCION | LOS ANGELES

Four people were killed in the Concepción area on 23 August. According to the authorities, "Members of the CNI [Chilean secret police] who were carrying out operations in the area in relation to numerous terrorist attacks which have occurred recently succeeded in detecting and neutralising various cells of the banned Movement of the Revolutionary Left [MIR] in different operations carried out on 23 August 1984 in the provinces of Concepción and Bío Bío..."

Because of the discrepancies between the official version of the deaths and that given by witnesses, the Archbishop of Concepción, Monseñor José Manuel Santos, presented a request to the Concepción Appeals Court asking them to appoint a special judge to investigate the killings. He said in the statement: "Two versions have been given which are totally different and therefore worrying; the official one, which talks of deaths in confrontations, the other, that of eye-witnesses, which talks of murders. Such a situation, because of its seriousness, needs to be profoundly investigated."

The Appeals Court rejected his request on the grounds that it did not fall within the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. Following a meeting between Monseñor Santos and the president of the Supreme Court, Sr. Rafael Retamal, the Supreme Court ordered the Military Appeals Court to appoint an Ad Hoc Military Prosecutor (Fiscal Militar Ad Hoc) to carry out the investigations.

Luciano Humberto AEDO ARIAS, separated, three children, forestry worker

The official version of his death: "Members of the CNI detected a suspect walking along calle Grecia in Hualpencillo. When he became aware of the presence of the agents, the terrorist - whose identity is being investigated - took out a 9 calibre pistol and opened fire, hitting one of the security force members in the stomach...The agents repelled the attack, killing the suspect..."

The following is a summary of the version given by witnesses:

A security operation began at about 11.00h with agents surrounding the area. Luciano Aedo appeared walking down the street and was shot in the back. Further shots were fired at him while he was lying on the ground, and he was also beaten. He was moved from the pavement to the middle of the street. Pamphlets were thrown over his body and he was photographed (by the security forces). A television crew which "happened" to be in the area was allowed to film at the scene of the incident. All other journalists were kept away, and one journalist had a roll of film confiscated. Aedo's wife alleged that a week before he was killed he had told her that he couldn't continue visiting her and the children because he was being followed.

Nelson HERRERA RIVEROS, Mario Octavo LAGOS RODRIGUEZ

The official version of their deaths: "... Members of the CNI succeeded in locating two terrorists linked to the above [referring to Luciano Aedo and a woman who had been arrested] who, as they were about to be arrested, boarded a Talcahuano-Concepción bus, registration number UCR 065, Talcahuano, driven by Pedro Segundo Aguayo Aguayo. They proceeded to take the passengers hostage, among them several minors. After a spectacular chase along Avda Arturo Prat, the vehicle was intercepted and during the prolonged exchange of gunfire, all of the passengers were brought to safety without injury. The two subversive delinquents were hit by bullets, one of them dying immediately, the other on the way to hospital.

The terrorists, who were carrying a 9 calibre pistol and a 38 calibre revolver, tried, during the kidnapping of the passengers, to blow the bus up, without success because of the timely intervention of the security forces, who deactivated the device.."

The killings took place in front of many witnesses, among them the driver of the bus, Pedro Aguayo, who has testified to the Second Military Prosecutor's Office in Concepción. He and many others say the two men were shot by security forces without offering any resistance.

"...The two individuals got on the bus at the terminal. In fact they even got on several minutes before we left and asked me if the service was in operation. I began the journey without problems. Everything was normal. The bus gradually filled up as we went along Avenida Colón. I saw that the two men were still sitting on the front seat. I didn't see any strange package with them.

When we got to the Vega Monumental, plainclothes and uniformed police forced me to stop. I was one of the first to get off and at this point I realised that they were looking for the two men sitting on the front seat. One of them threw something under the seat which was later found to be a revolver or pistol. They didn't want to get off but at no time did they take any of the passengers hostage. People began to get off quickly when the police started throwing teargas bombs inside the bus....

The two men, who to me looked very much like university students, finally decided to get off. At no time did they shoot while they were getting off. On the contrary, they wanted to hand themselves over. The one who was shot dead in the street was the one who had thrown the weapon under the seats. The other tried to run away when he saw his dead friend but he too was shot..."

Other witnesses have said that they saw the two men getting off the bus with their hands in the air. The bullet which fatally hit Mario Lagos reportedly entered body below the left armpit, without passing through his arm. This tends to substantiate witnesses' version that he had his hands in the air.

Nelson Herrera died, according to the official version, on the way to hospital. According to reports, which are based on information from the Forensic Institute (Instituto Médico Legal), the bullet which killed him was fired from a carefully, firmly aimed weapon held only a few centimetres from his head. Gunpowder was visible around the wound. Other reports also indicate that when he arrived at the hospital, his hands were handcuffed behind his back.

Mario Ernesto MUJICA BARROS, 32

The official version stated: "In the province of Bío Bío, town of Los Angeles, a confrontation took place when members of the security forces proceeded to raid a house in calle Bombero Carlos Vihmeister, No. 841. An extremist who shot at the agents when they tried to arrest him died." They said that arms, explosives and subversive propaganda were found.

Reports indicate that Mario Mujica may have been arrested prior to the raid on his home, that he was taken there and shot dead. Witnesses say they saw him being driven up to the house in a jeep by civilian agents, that he was taken inside and that several shots were heard; that agents were also seen taking packages into the house. (On several occasions, it has been reported that the CNI were seen taking packages believed to contain arms and explosives into the homes of individuals who have been arrested, which are then photographed and widely publicised by the official media to back up the authorities statements that they have arrested or killed "terrorists". There have been a number of instances where this has happened and where the courts have dismissed the charges of arms possession against the detainees and released them unconditionally.)

VALDIVIA

Three people died in Valdivia in alleged confrontations on 23|4 August. The Bishop of Valdivia, Monseñor Alejandro Jiménez, expressed his grave concern about the killings in the area and said, "The Church of Valdivia, in the defence of life and rights of any citizen, offers its legal services to whoever needs them...What happened in Chile and in Valdivia these last few days cannot leave us indifferent. The immense silent majority want to be given the true facts, want real security and deep changes to end the new customs which are growing like a cyst in our society and are so alien to the true soul of Chile."

Rogelio Humberto TAPIA DE LA PUENTE, 31, forestry engineer, married, three children
Raúl Jaime BARRIENTOS MATAMALA, 24, former student

The first official version of their deaths stated that "On Thursday 23, in the evening, on the Niebla-Valdivia road, in the Estancilla Bridge sector, members of the security forces in a jeep were following subversive elements. There was a confrontation with three individuals who were carrying pistols, machine guns and sticks of dynamite. Two of the subversives died." The third person is said to have escaped. The report also gave the time of the confrontation as 17.30h. A second official statement amended the time of the incident to 18.10h and made no mention of a third person. In neither report was there any indication as to whether the two men who were being followed were walking or in a vehicle. (The alleged confrontation took place in a rural area and not in Valdivia itself.)

Apart from the discrepancies between the two official versions, other factors have also led relatives and others to question the authorities' account.

On 24 August, Raúl Barrientos' father took his son's body and had an autopsy carried out by two doctors. The body reportedly had two bullet wounds in the head, one of which caused instant death. Apart from other bullet wounds, there were also long, deep cuts in the left ribs. All the wounds, except the cuts, are said to correspond with damage to the respective part of his clothing, suggesting that the cuts were inflicted with at least some of his clothing removed.

Neighbours and friends say that Raúl had been followed for two weeks before he was killed. They also believe that it could have been a case of "mistaken identity" as they say he is not politically active. His brother was arrested the same day on charges under the Arms Control Law and is now in prison. Few details are available about the killing of Rogelio Tapia. However, a friend of his alleges that he saw him in a supermarket between 18.30 and 19.00h, after both of the times given by the authorities for the alleged "confrontation".

Juan José BONCOMPTE ANDREU

The official version of his death stated that security forces surrounded Boncomppte's house where he lived with his wife (who was seven months pregnant) but were repelled by shots, one of which wounded an agent. Security forces fired back, killing Juan Boncomppte. Ammunition and subversive material were found.

His wife alleges that, at about 15.45h, when the two of them were relaxing after lunch, they heard a loud banging on the door. A voice shouted at them to open up. When she did, she saw ten to fifteen armed civilians wearing green armbands. Among them was a woman with short hair and glasses. There were a number of vehicles parked outside the house.

The agents shouted at her to get down, and, on doing so, she heard about ten shots fired in the direction of the eastern side of the house. Six civilian agents then entered the house through the main door and began emptying several boxes of merchandise, while two others took her out of the house. She also heard them calling an ambulance through a portable radio transmitter. A funeral vehicle arrived. She herself was arrested and eventually taken to prison on charges under the Arms Control Law, after signing a paper which she was not allowed to read.

