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Amnesty International On Political Repression In Chile

by John Neagle

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In a report issued in London on Aug. 25, human rights group Amnesty International said that attacks on government opponents by clandestine groups linked to Chilean security forces have become a significant form of political repression. According to the report, 128 Chileans had been assaulted or kidnapped in the last 18 months and that hundreds more had received death threats. The report said, "Anyone perceived as critical of government practices risks harassment and thousands live with the uncertainty of possible abuse. Intimidation by clandestine groups is now one of the most common methods of political persecution in Chile." Amnesty stated that while the Chilean government attributed the attacks to ordinary criminals or rightwing extremist groups, there was "convincing evidence" that they were carried out by groups linked to official security forces. "Evidence which has emerged through the courts, the groups' methods of operation, the impunity with which they operate and the vast resources available to them all clearly point to an association with the security forces and official condonement," said the report. In addition, the human rights group stated that in rare instances, members of units have been photographed or otherwise identified as belonging to the military or police. Intimidation by clandestine paramilitary groups began to spread in 1983, and has increased in the buildup to an October plebiscite on a single candidate for the presidency. Victims of harassment and abuse have included trade union officials, human rights workers, community leaders in poor neighborhoods, bishops, lawyers, court officials, journalists and political activists. The report cites 128 cases of intimidation. One case involves Oscar Eloy Gomez, regional president of the Chilean Teachers' Association in the northern town of Arica, and leader of a local campaign for a no vote in the plebiscite. In April, Gomez was forced into a vehicle by unidentified men who took him to an isolated place, fired shots at his feet, kicked and beat him and told him he would get more of the same if he continued his activities. Other victims whose cases were summarized in the report have been given electric shocks, burned with hot metal or acid, or had marks cut into their flesh. Hundreds of threats have been sent, some with drawings of coffins and skulls, often warning of impending death. Sometimes dead animals accompanied the messages, said the report. (Basic data from AP, 08/25/88)

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