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Joyce Horman, left, speaks about the 1973 murder of her husband, U.S. journalist Charles Horman, center, under the regime of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Juan Garces, right, initiated a human rights case against Pinochet. Declassified memos have shed new light on the CIA's role in the case.

CIA May Have Role in Journalist's Murder

By VERNON LOEB
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A declassified State Department memorandum released yesterday cites circumstantial evidence that the CIA "may have played an unfortunate part" in the murder of an American journalist in Chile in 1973, shedding new light on a case that triggered a furor in Washington and inspired the movie "Missing."

While the State Department's concerns about the government's handling of the case were disclosed years ago to the family of the journalist, Charles Horman, the newly declassified memo includes the most explicit reference to date about possible CIA involvement in Horman's execution by Chilean operatives af-

ter Gen. Augusto Pinochet came to power in a coup.

Drafted in August 1976 by Rudy Fimbres, then head of the State Department's office of Chilean affairs, the memo says:

"U.S. intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death. At best, it was limited to providing or confirming information that helped motivate his murder by the [government of Chile]. At worst, U.S. intelligence was aware the [government of Chile] saw Horman in a rather serious light and U.S. officials did nothing to discourage the logical outcome of [Chilean] paranoia."

Joyce Horman, the journalist's widow, read emotionally from the document at a Washington news conference yesterday and later said

in an interview, "I think this is close to the smoking pistol here."

Horman and human rights activists were celebrating a British magistrate's decision hours earlier to extradite Pinochet to Spain to stand trial for human rights abuses. They also applauded yesterday's release of 1,100 U.S. government documents about Chile, which were declassified in a review ordered by President Clinton in February after Pinochet's arrest.

But they accused the CIA of failing to comply fully with Clinton's order, noting that agency officials still have not released any information about the CIA's role in the coup that

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topped Chilean President Salvador Allende.

The CIA responded yesterday by releasing a 1978 letter to the Justice Department, drafted in response to a lawsuit filed by Horman's family, stating that the "CIA had no prior knowledge of and played no role in either the death of Mr. Horman or in the events surrounding the subsequent disposition of his remains."

Mark Mansfield, a CIA spokesman, also promised that "covert action-related documents will be reviewed for declassification and released in the future."

Peter Kornbluh, a researcher at the nonprofit National Security Archive, said another State Department document released yesterday confirms for the first time that a U.S. official assigned to handle the Horman case, identified previously as a deputy consul, was actually a CIA officer.

Kornbluh said the official served as a go-between with Rafael Gonzalez, a Chilean intelligence operative involved in the Horman case. A State Department document released yesterday notes that Gonzalez made repeated claims that the "CIA got 'mixed up' in Horman's death and was 'behind it.'"