

Chile to Release 1st Major

SANTIAGO, Nov. 21—Final preparations began this week for the release of a group of Chile's political prisoners, announced two months ago and held up first by government hesitation then by differences with the relief agencies who must carry it out.

Despite lingering doubts over the extent and effect of the release program, church agencies early this week began the paperwork needed to take care of the first 100 prisoners nominated for exile by the military.

These prisoners, the first of a possible group of 500, according to sources involved in the program, were publicly named on Nov. 11, two months after Gen. Augusto Pinochet, chief of the Chilean junta, announced his intention to free selected captives.



CLODOMIRO ALMEYDA
... not on list

Some of the 100 have been in holding points or detention camps for more than a year.

All of them were held without trial or were charge for their political commitment to the socialist government of President Salvador Allende, who was overthrown last year.

The two-month delay was reportedly due to the Junta's desire to bet a response from the Soviet Union and Cuba, both of which were challenged by Gen. Pinochet to release an equal number of prisoners. Neither country, consulted through the International Red Cross in Geneva, has given a concrete answer.

Several sources involved also got the clear impression that the details of the prisoner release program had not been settled within the government when Gen. Pinochet made his speech in September.

"One garrison commander

met all the political detainees in his command and said they would be freed by order of Gen. Pinochet," one informant said. This is apparently not to be the case.

None of the political prisoners who are best known internationally were on the list of those to be released first. The most notably absent was Clodomiro Almeyda, the Socialist Party militant who served Allende as foreign minister and whose freedom was requested this month by a resolution of the U.N. General Assembly.

Almeyda, whose liberty has been sought by conservative former colleagues in Latin America and by universities in at least three countries including the United States, has been charged only with maladministration of public funds since he was incarcerated 14

Group of Political Prisoners

months ago. Those charges were recently dismissed by a Santiago court.

It has not been made clear whether the release program will include Almeyda or about a dozen other former ranking members of Allende's government and the Marxist political parties that supported it. The lack of clear criteria for selection is one of the unresolved points that has held up prisoner release, according to several sources involved in the negotiations.

The other points are legal and practical. Legally, exile can be a commuted form of prison sentence in Chile and according to sources in and out of government, some of the agencies called on by the government wanted assurances that all the released

prisoners chose exile voluntarily.

Practically, there is the problem of finding countries that will accept the Chilean exiles and possibly their families. No exact figures have been made public, but sources involved in the release program report that it could affect as many as 1,300 prisoners while family groups could push the figure to 6,000 persons.

International facilities for absorbing Chilean political exiles have been strained in the 14 months since the military coup that toppled Allende, according to diplomats here. The Latin tradition of political asylum, consecrated in three treaties, has resulted in 8,600 people leave the country through foreign embassies, while another 4,000 left-wing

foreigners caught here by the coup left as refugees. Others have become voluntary exiles, often with assistance from church and refugee groups.

Most have gone to Latin American and Western European countries, but very few socialist countries, except Romania, have accepted significant numbers of exiles.

Pressure for coordination among the agencies reached a peak this week with movement of 91 persons from the first 100 to Tres Alamos, a detention center near Santiago.

Faced with action by the government, the relief agencies reached an agreement in principle to begin setting up their end of the program. It has three parts.

The International Red Cross, which has had a permanent commission of Swiss na-

tionals in Chile since the coup, is expected by the government to interview each prisoner and get certain proof each is leaving voluntarily. Then an interdenominational group of Chilean churches, called the National Commission to Help Refugees, is to take charge of rounding up travel documents and settling family problems for those involved.

It is the second stage that began this week at Tres Alamos, according to Samuel Nalegach, executive secretary of the refugee commission.

Finally, the Intergovernmental Commission for European Migration is expected to arrange host countries and air tickets for those released. It is understood that the commission has pledged for almost 300 places from two Western European countries and Romania.