

Findings Apparently Disputed

Chile Bars Red Cross From Visiting Prisons

WASH. POST

By Joseph Novitski

5 JUN 74

Special to The Washington Post

SANTIAGO, Chile, June 4—The Chilean military government has prevented members of an International Red Cross mission from inspecting Chile's jails and prison camps for sources today.

The mission of 14 Swiss had visited jails and detention centers regularly to observe the treatment of prisoners since September, immediately after the military coup that ended President Salvador Allende's socialist government. On April 30, a blanket government authorization for the Red Cross prison visits expired. It has not been renewed, sources close to the mission said.

Inspection visits to the detention centers — set up throughout Chile to hold thousands of Chileans detained since the coup—has been the main work of the Red Cross mission to Chile. The mission has regularly communicated its findings to the government, but those findings have never been made public.

Diplomats in Santiago report that the junta has apparently reacted to pressure from the Red Cross and that, recently, a government official said that a Red Cross report had moved the government to transfer 34 former high officials of Allende's government from an island camp in the Straits of Magellan to four military installations near Santiago.

Dawson Island, where former Cabinet ministers and ranking political officials were held from September until last month, is one of three known detention camps established by the military government. The other two, called Chacabuco and Pisagua, are on the edge of the Atacama Desert in northern Chile.

The most recent official estimate revealed that more than 5,000 Chileans are still detained without charges at

these camps, as well as in jails and improvised detention centers.

Members of the Swiss-staffed Red Cross mission have visited all the known detention centers, provided some financial help to the families of detained men and observed the military trials of former supporters of Allende.

The mission was welcomed at first by the military junta. In part, its very presence reinforced the military government's argument that there were no political prisoners after the anti-Marxist coup, only prisoners of war taken in Chile's internal conflict and subject to the usual treatment reserved for POWs, including confinement in camps and visits from the Red Cross.

But the relationship cooled over the months as reports from the Red Cross mission began to flow to the government. The contents of these reports are not known. It is understood, however, that mission members reported in detail on the treatment of prisoners.

Given the frequency with which former detainees have reported that they were tortured while under arrest or investigation, the reports probably mentioned the use of torture, an issue on which the junta is particularly sensitive.

In April, Santiago's censored newspapers reported that Red Cross men who visited the prisoners then on Dawson Island, off the icy southern coast, had taken forbidden messages off the island for some prisoners and smuggled in weapons that were described only as "sharp instruments." That sort of information could only have come from the government, and it is reliably understood that the Red Cross mission was told the newspaper stories reflected the official government view.