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Search for Imprisoned Torturers

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SANTIAGO, May 19—A week of document searches, prison interviews and several cases of mistaken identity have failed to confirm Chilean President Augusto Pinochet's assertion that military men have been jailed for mistreatment of political prisoners.

Confronted with the information that none of the inmates listed as convicted torturers had been jailed for mistreating political prisoners, a government spokesman concluded yesterday that there were no torturers serving sentences in Chile.

The finding contradicts Pinochet's repeated statements that security personnel guilty of "excesses" in their treatment of political prisoners are

punished. Last week he agreed to allow me to see such prisoners to support his claim.

Opponents of the Chilean military junta have long held that torture, far from being punished, is an integral part of the government security system and is widespread.

At Pinochet's authorization, the Ministry of Justice provided the names of, first an army officer, and then 11 more military men held prisoner in two Santiago prisons. All had been convicted of violent crimes including rape, murder, assault and robbery.

Private interviews with 9 of the 12 disclosed that none of the crimes they were jailed for related to political prisoners. Three were released from jail before the interviews took place.

According to the men interviewed, none of the crimes had occurred during interrogation of prisoners and none involved the deliberate, graduated violence associated with torture. Further, the men all said they knew of no torturers who had been jailed.

"The policy of the government is to punish those people," said presidential press secretary Federico Willoughby when told that none of the names provided were those of torturers. "I know that there are some in jail, really. It must be that the officials in charge of providing the names are protecting the (armed) services."

Informed of that, Ministry of Justice officials repeated that they had no other names to offer and relayed the prob-

lem to the national director of social communication, Orlando Jerez, who investigated and responded: "The list you have is all that there are. These people were convicted of offenses against the public. There are no torturers in Chile, in the jails or out."

The effort to find jailed torturers was based on President Pinochet's statement in an interview last Monday that "during the first days and months" of his government, which took power on Sept. 11, 1973, "there were some activities, some people exceeded (their duties) in these actions and now they're in jail, including an officer."

Government officials have acknowledged privately to foreign reporters that political prisoners are occasionally

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Draws a Blank in Chile

"physically persuaded," as one officer put it, but they have insisted that court complaints of torture are investigated and the guilty parties are jailed.

The authorized interviews were held last Tuesday and Saturday in the wardens' offices of two prisons, the main Santiago penitentiary and the penitentiary annex.

In addition to the nine authorized interviews, a 10th man with a name similar to one of the three who had been released was produced by a penitentiary guard in an apparent error. He turned out to be a political prisoner, a former soldier accused of membership in the outlawed Revolutionary Leftist Movement.

"No, they haven't beat me here," he said. "It's the army that does that. You're looking

for torturers?" He laughed. "They agree with the government. They wouldn't be in here."

He said he was arrested in September 1974 when two fellow members of the outlawed group, also soldiers, who had been arrested earlier apparently gave authorities his name. He said he didn't know if they had been mistreated.

The closest thing to a political incident recounted in the interviews was an experience described by Omar de la Jara, 26, a former officer of the Carabineros, or national police force. Asked to describe events on the day of his arrest, he said he had been on patrol July 19 in Lota, a coal mining town near Concepcion in the south, when a passer-by called out insults.

"He said 'Assassin' and some things I can't repeat to you," said Jara.

"Now I don't make much money and my wife was sick. I have four children and I was worried about them, thinking about them not being well cared for or having enough to eat ... so I became angry. I stopped this man and asked him why he had insulted me ... and I frisked him."

"This man lied, he said I took 25,000 escudos," about \$25 at that time. "But I didn't. I only took 5,000, and that was to put food in the mouths of my babies."

He said he released the man, who went promptly to the next policeman he saw and had Jara arrested. Had he stopped the man on suspicion

that he was a wanted political extremist?

"No," Jara answered. I stopped him because he insulted me." Jara is serving five years for robbery and intimidation.

Four of the men interviewed said they were jailed for rape, three committed while the men were on patrol enforcing Santiago's 1 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. curfew and the fourth while the patrolman was off duty. Two of the inmates said they were jailed for fights after they had been drinking heavily while off duty. The officer mentioned by Pinochet said he was involved in an auto accident in which a civilian was killed. Two of the three released men had been charged with murder.