

Chilean Refugees Stymied

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BUENOS AIRES—Chilean refugees who live uncomfortably in Argentina, waiting for a chance to get out, are finding other nations increasingly reluctant to give them new homes.

A small, handprinted sign by the "enquiries" window of the British embassy here is addressed in Spanish to "Chileans wanting to know if there is any news."

If they have been accepted to move to England, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees will notify them; if not, someone else will notify them, and if they have not been notified, this means the case has not been decided yet, the note says curtly.

For 12 of the 10,000 refugees who have registered with the U.N. commission since September 1973, the waiting was too much. They occupied the commission office Oct. 8, taking five officials hostage, and finally extorted passage for themselves and five family members to Algeria and asylum there.

"We're taking advantage of that to tell these diplomats it shows how unhappy these people are here. It was an act of desperation," said Robert J. Miller of Switzerland, the U.N. refugee commission's regional representative for Latin America.

Instead, however, some diplomatic sources say their governments viewed it as one more proof that the Chilean refugees are dangerous extremists who are likely to disrupt things in any country that receives them. The threats of violence against Chilean tennis players Patricio Cornejo and Jaime Filio during the September Davis Cup Finals in Sweden were another disquieting incident.

There have, however, been no other proven incidents attributable to the Chilean refugees, who have been leaving Argentina for other countries at the rate of 140 or more a month in the two years since the socialist government of President Salvador Allende was overthrown in a right-wing coup. Often pressured by their domestic Socialist or Communist parties, more than 40 countries have accepted them, providing language training, jobs, homes and grubstake.

Now, however, "the market is just about saturated," said a European diplomat. Meanwhile, the refugees continue to arrive, applying for registration at the U.N. offices here and in Mendoza near the Chilean border at the rate of about 1,200 a month. Only about 250 a month are accepted as genuine political refugees eligible for relocation under international conventions.

Once accepted, they wait. The U.N. commission's budget of \$2.5 million for all the world's refugees allows only the barest necessities to be provided. Although Argentine law forbids it, many refugees work furtively at part-time manual labor in order to buy cigarettes, soap and newspapers, cadging when they can. They live in fear of the more or less routine arrests by edgy Argentine police looking for urban guerrillas, and they have no guarantees of personal security under Argentine law.

Twelve have died under mysterious circumstances in the past year and four more have disappeared since April. Some 2,500 are now crowding the drafty, cold and dirty refugee centers here and in Mendoza. They complain bitterly about the unhealthy conditions.

"We live like animals here," said a thin young Chilean, at the dark, four-story refugee center on seedy Brasil Street here. Five families, a total of 22 persons, were sleeping in 10 bunk beds in one room.

The U.N. commission wanted to close the Brasil Street center, but the 60 refugees now remaining there refused to be moved to another center far outside the city. They are also refusing to be moved into a hotel under contract to the church-sponsored group called CAREF that handles their day-to-day needs. They fear that CAREF officials could then pressure them into dropping their demands for better conditions by threatening to stop payments to the hotel.

Convinced that U.N. officials are doing little to help them to relocate, the refugees have staged hunger strikes, accused some of their own group of being spies and informers who receive preferential treatments, and have taken their case to the local press.

"But what we want most of all is to leave Argentina," said a woman stirring soup at the Brasil Street refuge. "Everything else is unimportant."