

New excavation at Pinochet-era Colonia Dignidad to shed light on Chile's torture victims



Santiago de Chile, May 5 (RHC)-- In Chile, excavations at Colonia Dignidad have rendered new hope to the family and friends of the victims who were tortured on the site. Founded in 1961 by Paul Schäfer, a former medic in Nazi-era German army who fled the country in 1959 to escape child abuse charges, used the 32,000-acre (13,000-hectare) site located in the isolated region south of Santiago to abuse, torture and indoctrinate people for over three decades.

The camp with some 300 Germans was completely cut off from the rest of the country and was also used as a torture site under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, where DINA, the Chilean secret service agents tortured Leftist opposition members.

According to Chile's national commission for truth and reconciliation, 40 corpses may have been dug up at Colonia Dignidad, before being chemically burned and their ashes tossed into the river Perquilauquén, which runs to the south of the 37,000-acre compound, the Guardian reported.

But, more recently, a former colony member who at the time was in charge of the heavy machinery used to exhume the bodies testified that one of the graves had remained intact. "Finding this grave is the last

hope for the families of the disappeared. The search must continue for as long as it takes to find it," Winfried Hempel, a lawyer representing the victims of human rights abuses perpetrated at the enclave.

The magnitude of the atrocities came to light after Pinochet's regime tumbled. "We have shared information, provided certain documents and opened the way for witnesses to testify in Germany," Carroza told reporters, AFP reported.

On April 25, Chile's court held nearly two hours of talks with German prosecutors and representatives of the justice ministry to update them on the Chilean probe into the pedophile sect's leaders, judicial officials said according to the French agency.

Schaefer went on the run for a second time in 1996, fleeing to Argentina to escape further abuse charges — but was caught in 2005 and jailed a year later for 20 years over abusing and torturing children and other residents. He died at a prison hospital in 2010.

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