

Former dictatorship agents convicted in Chile... 40 years later



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Santiago de Chile, February 3 (RHC)-- The Court of Appeals of Santiago de Chile has sentenced four former members of the military and a former government official for the murders of prisoners in the former Public Prison during the military dictatorship.

The court sentenced to 15 years in prison former military officers Eduardo Arriagada, Sergio Rosende, Joaquín Larraín and Jaime Fuenzalida for the murders of Víctor Corvalán and Héctor Walter Pacheco. They were also charged and convicted of intent to kill Guillermo Rodríguez, Ricardo Antonio Aguilera, Elizardo Enrique Aguilera, Adalberto Muñoz and Rafael Enrique Garrido.

The then warden of that prison, Ronald Bennett, was sentenced to 10 years behind bars for his complicity in the actions, which consisted of poisoning the prisoners with botulismus toxin in December 1981, in what was described as "a special intelligence operation."

The ruling establishes that these are crimes against humanity, and therefore, imprescriptible and without amnesty, in accordance with International Criminal Law on Human Rights. It also states that such action was part of a systematic and generalized State policy, practiced by its agents against the civilian population, and that it caused serious damage to the victims, two of whom died and the other five were saved thanks to the adoption of timely therapeutic measures.

During the investigation of the case, it was established that the poison was obtained in a laboratory in Brazil, sent by diplomatic pouch to Chile, received at the Foreign Ministry and then delivered to a secret laboratory under the Army Intelligence Directorate.

The substance was administered in the food of the prisoners, five of whom belonged to the Revolutionary Left Movement, and although they were taken to the prison infirmary to be treated for the poisoning, they were returned to their cells after being diagnosed with acute gastritis.

The ruling ratified the sentence that condemned the State of Chile to pay a total compensation of 950 million pesos (about one million 300 thousand U.S. dollars) to the families of the victims.

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