

Chilean ex-military officers convicted for murder of Spanish diplomat

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Santiago de Chile, August 24 (RHC)-- Chile's Supreme Court has convicted six former agents of the former National Intelligence Directorate (DINA) and two former military personnel for the murder of Spanish diplomat Carmelo Soria, carried out on July 14, 1976.

The DINA was the secret police during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Its agents kidnapped Soria, who was a communist militant and worked for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on July 12, 1976 and took him to a torture center, where he was murdered two days later.

His lifeless body was then placed inside a vehicle and thrown into a ravine to simulate a traffic accident for allegedly driving under the influence of alcohol.

In a statement, the Supreme Court said that two high-ranking DINA officers, Pedro Espinoza Bravo and Raúl Eduardo Iturriaga (15 years and one day in prison each), as well as military officer Juan Morales Salgado (10 years and one day), were convicted as perpetrators of the homicide. All three are already serving prison terms for human rights violations.

Other DINA agents sentenced to different prison terms were Guillermo Salinas Torres (as perpetrator), René Quilhot and Pablo Belmar (homicide and illicit association).

In addition, a former general of the armed forces, Eugenio Covarruvias Valenzuela, and a former military prosecutor, Sergio Cea Cienfuegos, received prison sentences (for false statements under oath and forgery of a public instrument, respectively).

The Supreme Court's ruling, which cannot be appealed, called attention to the fact that "Espinoza Bravo, Iturriaga Neumann and Morales Salgado were already convicted for the same conduct (the crime of illicit association) in the investigation for the murders of Carlos Prats González and Sofía Cuthbert Charleoni."

ECLAC welcomed the Supreme Court's ruling, which had been 46 years in the making and comes less than a month before the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état perpetrated by Pinochet against Socialist President Salvador Allende.

Former General Carlos Prats González was the former commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army at the time of the coup d'état. He left the country when he learned that coup plotters wanted to kill him. His wife, Sofía Cuthbert Charleoni, followed shortly thereafter. Both were assassinated on September 30, 1974 in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires, when the car in which they were traveling was attacked by a remotely triggered explosive.

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