

Ex-Pinochet Commander Arrested Over 'Death Caravan' Involvement



Santiago de Chile, July 9 (RHC)-- Former Chilean Army Commander Juan Emilio Cheyre, along with six military officials, was arrested Thursday in Chile for his involvement in the death of 15 people as part of an operation known as the Death Caravan, launched a month after the Pinochet coup in October 1973.

Judge Mario Carroza told La Tercera newspaper that the decision to arrest the former commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army was based on "knowledge of what happened during the three hours in La Serena," where the killing took place.

Carroza added that "testimonies of direct observers during the reconstruction of the scene" coincided with other elements of the investigation, and will be an important factor in the trial. The arrests followed a complaint filed by the Human Rights Program affiliated with the Interior Ministry.

Cheyre was named commander-in-chief of Chile's Army in 2002, one year before he was publicly accused of participating in the murder of a couple and stealing their 2-year-old child in La Serena back in 1973. Chile's justice eventually filed a case without finding Cheyre responsible for the act.

Serving in the top-ranking military role until 2006, Cheyre was appointed as president of Chile's electoral body in 2013 by the neoliberal President Sebastian Piñera.

The Death Caravan was the name of a military operation that killed and disappeared almost 100 political prisoners in Chile, following General Augusto Pinochet's coup and with the support of the United States. The operation ruled the country with an iron fist for 17 years, until 1990.

Cheyre jailed an estimated 80,000 people, tortured 30,000 and murdered around 3,200. Only 75 of more than a thousand of his former agents are serving prison sentences for human rights violations.

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