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CHILE: Amnesty International's Secretary General on human rights mission in Chile

Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané, will be leading a delegation of Amnesty International representatives to the Chilean capital, Santiago, between 1 and 6 October.

The Secretary General will be calling for the formulation of a national plan of action on human rights. The agenda for the visit includes meetings with high-ranking government officials, the Church, non-governmental organizations and the business community.

"In the past months we have witnessed important advances in the search for truth and justice in the serious cases of human rights violations committed under the Chilean military government," Mr Sané said, making reference to the recent lifting of Augusto Pinochet's parliamentary immunity.

"However, much remains to be done to uncover the truth about the thousands of men and women who were victims of "disappearance", extrajudicial execution or torture during the military government, and to bring those responsible to justice," Mr Sané added. "Obtaining truth and justice is a duty owed to the victims and their families, and it is a vital element towards reaching true reconciliation and preventing similar tragedies from ever happening again."

Amnesty International considers the 1978 Amnesty Law to be one of the main obstacles still hindering the course of justice for past human rights violations. This law was described by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as incompatible with Chile's obligations under international law.

"However, the issue of human rights in Chile is not confined to the past," Mr Sané continued. Ending impunity for past human rights violations and guaranteeing full respect of the rights of all, both now and in future: these are the crucial challenges Chile is facing at the dawn of the new millennium. During his visit, Mr Sané will be raising with the authorities and various elements of civil society Amnesty International's human rights concerns in today's Chile. These include ongoing reports of torture and ill-treatment, the jurisdiction of military courts over certain cases of civilians and over military personnel accused of human rights violations, and the death penalty.

Mr Sané will also be enquiring as to the present government's policies on the rights of women, children, indigenous people and human rights defenders, in the light of the international commitments undertaken by Chile.

"Today's Chile must be a country where the rights of all are respected and guaranteed," Mr Sané said. "This includes the right of the victims to justice, the right of their families to know the truth, and ultimately the right of all Chileans to live in a country rid of the heavy legacies of the past, such as torture and the death penalty, in the framework of a judicial system free from political interference."

All these elements should be taken into consideration in the formulation of a national plan of action on human rights, in keeping with the commitment made by all of the world's states in June 1993 during the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights.

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