

# World View

## The Pinochet Precedent

The Chilean Supreme Court's decision to try Augusto Pinochet put human rights violators on notice that judgment may yet come knocking on their doors. Pinochet was formally charged in January with one murder and nine kidnappings in a lawsuit brought against him by victims' families. The Chilean government reports that more than 3,000 people were murdered and 27,000 tortured during his brutal 17-year rule, which began with a violent U.S.-backed coup in 1973.

Attempts by victims' families to bring Pinochet to trial stalled two years ago, when the Chilean Supreme Court decided that his mental health was too poor for him to endure a trial. But the case was reopened last year after the 89-year-old retired general appeared lucid in a television interview, and a Chilean judge discovered that he still had the mental faculty to manage his secret bank accounts containing as much as \$12 million stashed away in the Washington, D.C.-based Riggs Bank.

"I think the Supreme Court's decision reflects the opinion of the immense majority of Chileans," said Chilean writer and Duke University professor Ariel Dorfman, who was forced into exile after Pinochet seized power. "Pinochet must not be allowed to hide from justice due to his age or infirmities."

High-profile judicial proceedings have already extended to at least one of Chile's collaborators in

Operation Condor, a cabal of South American military governments that tortured, "disappeared" and killed political opponents beginning in the mid-1970s. In September 2004 an Argentine prosecutor charged 18 high-ranking military officials, including former head of the Argentine military junta General Jorge Rafael Videla, for their roles in the conspiracy.

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Paula Allen

The women of Calama, Chile, spent 17 years searching the Atacama desert for this mass grave site of 26 men killed under Pinochet's command in 1973.