

Chilean military accepts responsibility for human rights abuses during Pinochet era

SANTIAGO - Chile's military for the first time took full responsibility yesterday for widespread **human rights abuses** during Augusto Pinochet's 17-year dictatorship. Pinochet's opponents, including leaders of the centre-left government, hailed the landmark declaration as a historic step toward healing wounds still festering from the brutal military crackdown that killed some 3,000 people. The military had always denied that **abuse** was part of an institutional agenda, blaming some overzealous officers for the kidnapping, torture and execution of leftists during the 1973-1990 Pinochet regime. "The Chilean army has taken the tough, but irreversible, decision to assume responsibilities as an institution for all of the punishable and morally unacceptable acts of the past," General Emilio Cheyre, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, wrote in the declaration published in two leading newspapers. The statement came before a government commission is due next week to release a report with testimony from some 30,000 political prisoners who survived torture at the hands of the armed forces and secret police during the Pinochet era. Analysts said the report would put the military in an uncomfortable position because it exposes torture as part of military policy rather than just sporadic "excesses." Gen. Cheyre dismissed the military's traditional defence that Cold War realities could justify the **abuses**. "Does the context of a global conflict excuse the **human rights** violations that occurred in Chile? I have one, unequivocal response: No. **Human rights** violations can never be justified," Gen.

Cheyre wrote. "The Chilean army is completing a process of integrating itself into today's democracy," President Ricardo Lagos said in Rio de Janeiro, where he is participating in a Latin American leaders' summit. Gen. Cheyre is part of a generation of new officials mostly untainted by alleged past **abuses** that is gradually taking control of the armed forces and distancing the military from Pinochet's legacy. Last year, Gen. Cheyre won praise for saying that "never again" would Chile's armed forces commit **human rights** crimes. Since Pinochet stepped down, Chile -- a nation of 15 million -- has become a model of political and economic stability under 14 years of democratically elected governments.

Source: National Post, November 6, 2004.