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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 21/86

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ATTENTION PRESS OFFICERS: The following information may be used in response to inquiries about Amnesty International's concerns in the recent unrest in Chile.

CHILE: EIGHT KILLED, HUNDREDS ARRESTED DURING PROTESTS

Eight people are reported to have been killed by security forces and hundreds arrested in Chile last week as the government brought troops and police out to suppress a two-day protest called by opposition groups for 2 and 3 July. Members of a military patrol are reported to have poured petrol over two teenagers and set them alight after detaining them on 2 July. One of the victims died in hospital after being badly burned. The other is still in hospital in a critical condition. Rodrigo Rojas de Negri aged 19, died in hospital on 5 July, 18-year-old Carmen Quintana Arancibia is now in hospital with burns on 60 per cent of her body.

Youths who were with them at the time said that they were surrounded by a military patrol in an area of Santiago where barricades were being built by protesters. The eyewitnesses gave the following account of what happened: the two youths were taken into a side street and severely beaten. While they were being beaten, another member of the patrol doused them with petrol and set them on fire. After they had been burning for a few minutes, the soldiers are reported to have wrapped them in blankets and driven them to the outskirts of the city where they were abandoned.

A further seven people were reportedly shot dead by troops or armed civilians believed to work in association with the security forces. All the victims were people from the poblaciones (poor districts around Santiago), where opposition to the government is widespread and protests are common. One of the victims was 13-year old Nadia Fuentes Silva, reportedly shot when she went out to buy bread. Witnesses say that police continued shooting and throwing tear gas grenades while she bled to death in the street.

Amnesty International believes that these incidents are part of a pattern of unrestrained violence against protesters. Despite numerous previous cases where protesters and innocent passers-by were injured, beaten or killed, the government is not known to have taken any measures to end such abuses.

At least 600 people were arrested during the protests. Some were held by the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI), the state security police, during the night before the protests began, in characteristic pre-emptive raids. Several held by the CNI were reportedly tortured before being released without charge.

The government has also taken measures to restrict the press and silence leaders of the protests.

On 4 July 100 journalists marched through the city to protest over a government news ban on four opposition radio stations. Journalists from two well-known opposition magazines have had prosecution orders issued against them by the government for writing columns that supported the protests. The 17 leaders of the National Civic Assembly - a coalition of professional, trade union, community and other organizations - including its president and head of the Chilean Medical College Dr Juan Luis Gonzalez, which organized the two-day protest, have been accused of inciting subversion. They face charges under the internal security laws. Reports said that the 17 have not yet been arrested -- they are believed to be in hiding awaiting an official reply to their request for guarantees for a fair trial.

The Civic Assembly had called for peaceful protests as part of a campaign of civil disobedience to demand early free elections and immediate changes in human rights, social and economic policies.

Amnesty International has appealed urgently for independent investigations into the deaths, and for the withdrawal of arrest orders against individuals who have not used or advocated violence. Amnesty International also called on the government not to condone the unrestrained use of violence by troops and police and to take effective measures to stop the killing and ill-treatment of protesters and to punish those who commit such abuses.