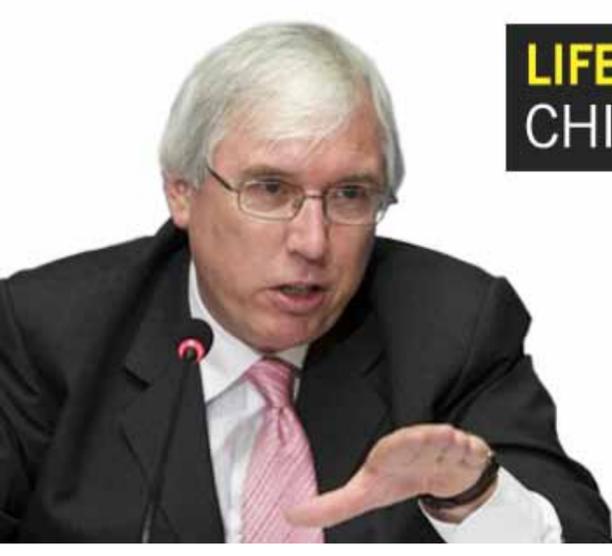


# LIFE UNDER PINOCHET CHILE REMEMBERS

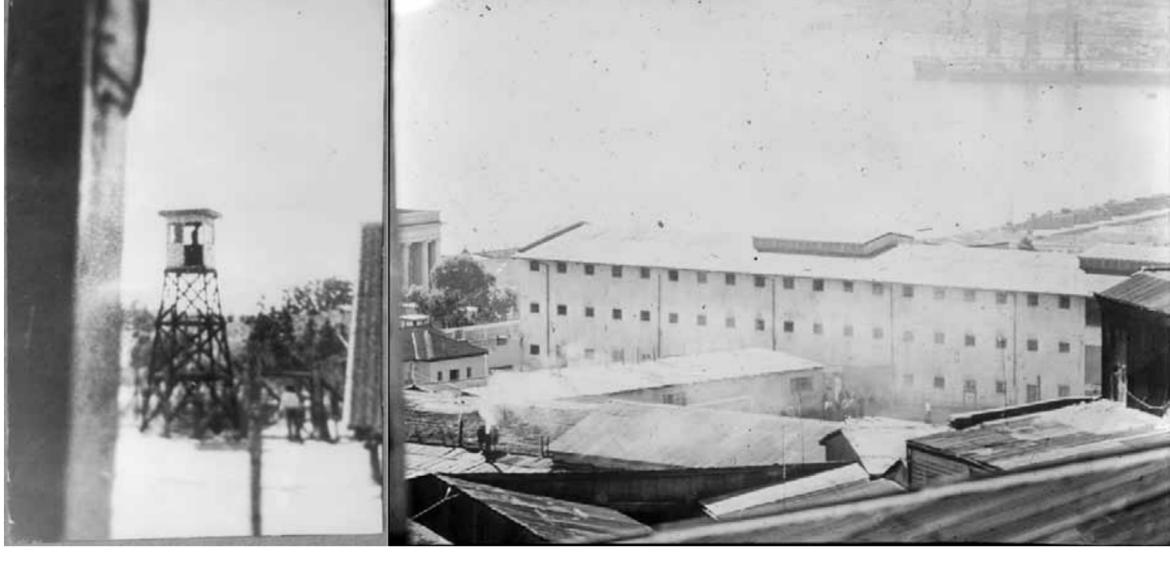


## ROGER PLANT

"I remember being shown some very severe signs of torture"

Roger Plant joined Amnesty International in 1972 to cover the organization's work on Latin America. A few months later, he was sent to Chile to document the arbitrary detentions, torture and disappearances taking place under the brutal Pinochet regime. The result was a groundbreaking report that helped shine a light on reality in the Latin-American country.

When Roger Plant, who had recently been hired as a researcher at Amnesty International, sat on a plane that would take him from London to Santiago de Chile in late 1973, a few months after Augusto Pinochet took power by force he was unsure if he was going to be allowed into the country.



The visit was one of the first that intended to look at reports of illegal detentions, torture and disappearances that were taking place in the Latin-American country after General Pinochet had taken office by force on 11 September 1973.

"The day of the coup I was in London. I was at home when I was called and we rushed into immediate activity. I remember very quickly contacting the various Chilean friends and contacts we had. So very quickly we got the picture together," he explained.

"The (Amnesty International) Secretary General, the sadly late and wonderful Martin Ennals wanted us to go as soon as we could. I remember at Heathrow airport there was a message for me and I called Martin Ennals and he said 'Roger, we heard from the Foreign Minister that the delegation will not be allowed to enter Chile, You will never be able to go ahead.' I got on the plane slightly disturbed and when I got to New York I contacted Martin and he said 'I'm glad to say that the Chileans have changed their minds and you will be allowed in after all.'"

### Entering unfriendly territory

But entering a country in the midst of a human rights crisis, as thousands of social activists, dissidents, teachers, lawyers and trade unionists were being rounded up, detained, tortured and disappeared to stop them from speaking out about human rights was not a simple task.

A young Roger Plant crossed Santiago's airport doors with Frank Newman, a then law professor in the University of California and Judge Bruce Sandler who was Preceding Judge of the Supreme Court of Orange County, California.



The Chilean authorities had agreed for the challenging visit to take place under a very strict remit that would prevent the activists from visiting some of the places that would later become renowned for the abuses that were taking place within its walls.

"It was a terrible situation. Within a couple of days I was inside the National Stadium, which was by then being emptied," Roger recalls.

"They tried very hard not to let us go. We went in the National stadium guided by some Chilean government officials but I remember getting away from them and being able to talk to some of the political prisoners. It was a very strange situation. On the one hand, there can be a great deal of control and on the other hand there can be a certain amount of chaos in a situation like that."

### Victims and abusers

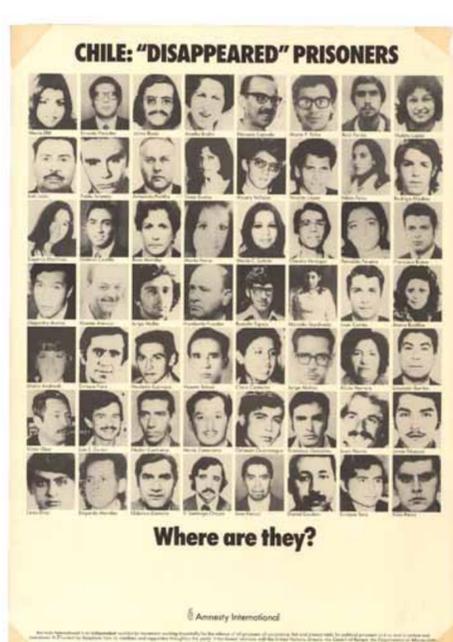
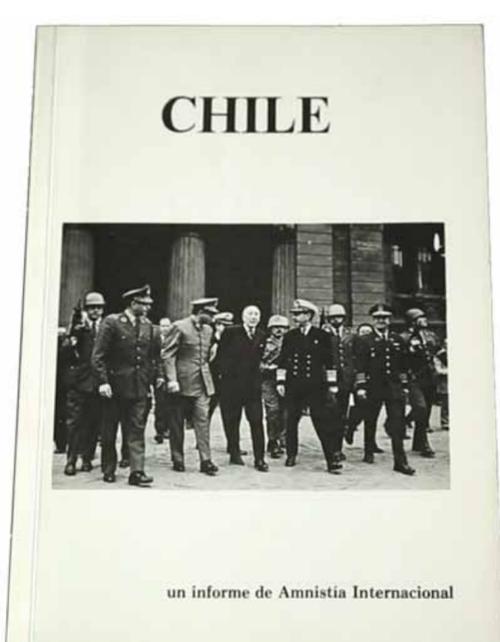
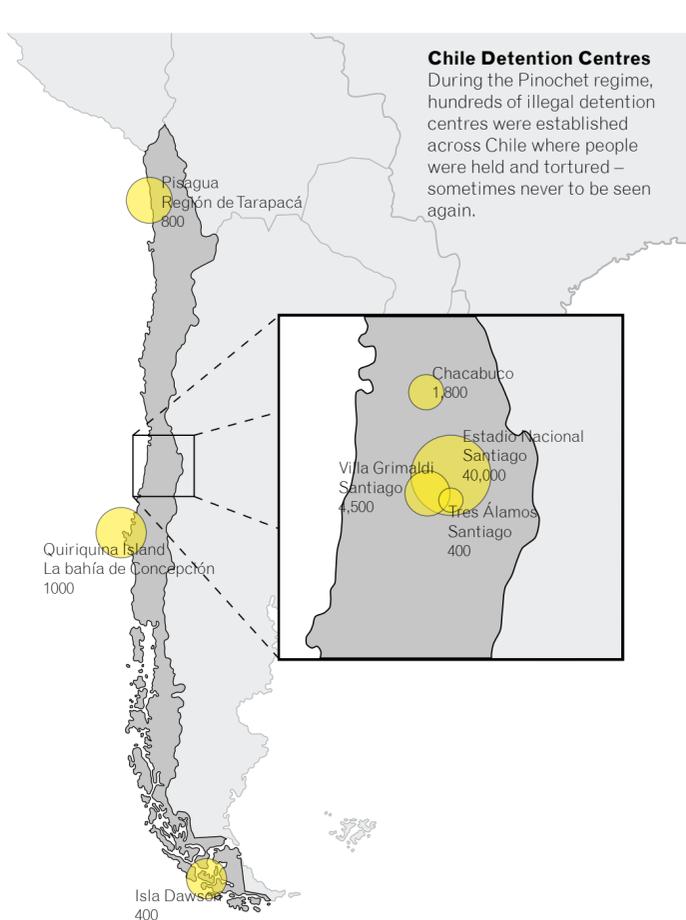
Over an eight day visit, the Amnesty International delegates meet dozens of torture survivors, relatives of activists who had been detained and whose whereabouts were still unknown and with government officials, who tried to justify the abuses that were taking place.

"I remember being shown some very severe signs of torture. Someone showing me his wrists and I remember being given a list of people that we circulated as quickly as we could afterwards. It was all very quick because we were running around getting as much information as we could but knowing that the military was going to be coming along, pushing you, stopping you, moving you along as quickly as possible."

"It was a mix of talking to some very brave people who were working directly with the political prisoners and talking to some of the government officials like the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Justice who was completely powerless and talking to a number of the diplomats who were also doing everything they could to intervene on behalf of those who were at risk."

The messages they received from activists and government representatives were completely opposed.

"It was extremely depressing to meet with the entire general council of the bar association which was absolutely denying everything, justifying everything. I remember meeting the Minister of Justice who had just started. He said he had no control over any of the prisons under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence and Interior. And as we found out over 90% of the prisoners and prisons were under the control of the Ministries of Defence and Interior. So, what you had was a façade of justice, they were keeping that façade of justice."



### The report

Roger returned to London after eight days in Chile to write what would later be known as one of the first reports that documented the shocking abuses taking place in Pinochet's Chile.

The document included dozens of testimonies of arbitrary detentions, torture and disappearances and sparked a global call for action. It catapulted an international campaign to help those at risk.

"You have to remember the circumstances, Pinochet was getting a fair amount of support in the US at that time and it was really to exploit any argument that there was any rule of law in Chile. Even though they had a façade of rule of law everything was completely overwhelmed by military justice, in keeping with the state of war, state of siege, threats against defence lawyers and there was no rule of law whatsoever."