

SPEECH DELIVERED BY JACOB SODERMAN
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
AT THE OPENING SESSION
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More than four years a tragic message was spread throughout the world. The lawful government of Chile had been forcefully overthrown in a military coup the brutality of which astonished everybody. Tens of thousands of people were murdered, including the President of the Republic, Salvador Allende.

What was the objective nature of this Government and why was it overthrown? Nationally, the Government had made immense efforts to improve the economic, social and cultural situation of the Chilean people. It was a Government by the people and for the people, and its conduct was marked by high moral integrity and respect for the Chilean constitutional and legal system. Internationally, the Government was a brilliant representative of the just aspiration of the developing countries. A new economic and social order, world peace and disarmament and respect for international law, are among the laudable goals of this movement, which Chile was actively participating in.

For these reasons the Chilean Government was a dangerous government for certain circles, and a veritable campaign was organized in order to hamper its work and eventually to eliminate it. Unfortunately, this campaign scored a temporary success. I say temporary, because democracy and progress can only be retarded, but never eliminated.

It was natural and unavoidable that the coup and the coming to power of the military Junta would arouse not only worldwide indignation but also concrete efforts to help the Chilean people in its fight for democracy, law, and human rights. Many inter-governmental and non-government organizations took up the Chilean situation, for consideration. The rule of the military Junta also provoked the initiative to form an international fact-finding body to study and analyse what was taking

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place in Chile and what conclusions should be drawn from this from the standpoint of the protection of human rights and respect for international and Chilean law.

The founding of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Crimes of the Military Junta in Chile took place in 1974, in Helsinki. Present were eminent lawyers, politicians, trade unionists and other international personalities representing many different countries and regions, and a wide spectrum of political and ideological backgrounds. What united these people was a common concern for the Chilean people, and for human right and fundamental freedoms.

At its first Helsinki session, the Commission came to the conclusion that the allegations against the military Junta were true - that it was guilty of serious crimes against international and Chilean law. After the Helsinki session the Commission has held sessions and hearings in Copenhagen in 1974, Mexico City in 1975, again Helsinki in 1976 and in Stockholm the same year, and in Luxembourg in 1977.

At each meeting a large number of witnesses have been heard and various reports and documents have been examined. The conclusions reached at these sessions and meetings have the basic conclusion reached in 1974 has been found valid during the subsequent years: The military Junta has established and maintained a system of terror and violence against the Chilean law, for which it has been condemned by the international community and for which it will be, in due time, tried and punished in accordance with law and justice.

The final evaluation of the success of the work of our Commission cannot be done by the Commission itself but by history. The most important of our goals, the return of democracy and human rights to Chile has not been achieved. The military Junta, ^{guilty} of deliberate and serious crimes is still in power.

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However, there are also many reasons for a certain satisfaction with the work done. The Commission has been able to participate actively in the international efforts to spread information about the actual situation in Chile, to mobilize the democratic forces of the world to show concrete solidarity with the Chilean people, and to compel the Junta to restore democracy and human rights.

At the Mexico session of our Commission we made an appeal for the release of political prisoners in Chile. This appeal made specific mention of certain Unidad Popular leaders, who had been arrested unlawfully and were held in brutal detention without any specific charges. Among those mentioned were Among other Luis Corvalan, Anibal Palma and Gustavo Rus,

Today we look around and we see them among us in this hall today.

Naturally, the International Commission of Enquiry is not the only body which has worked for the restoration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Chile and for the release of the political prisoners. The United Nations and its specialized agencies in particular have made a remarkable contribution to these efforts. The UN General Assembly has passed strong and wise resolutions since 1974 condemning the rule of the military Junta, and the UN Economic and social Council, the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Ad Hoc Working Group established by the Commission has made great contributions both in words and deeds to our common cause;

The attitude of the military Junta in Chile towards International fact-finding has been extremely negative. The UN Ad Hoc Working Group has not been able to visit the country in order to conduct on-the-spot investigations. The leader of the Junta, General Pinochet, has openly shown disregard for the Junta Working Group and for the United Nations in general. A new indication of the Junta's attitude came to the light when the Secretary-General of our Commission, Hans-Goran-Franck, made a visit to Chile last week. He was stopped at Santiago airport and told to leave Chile by the earliest possible flight. This is the Junta's answer to demands for information about the situation in Chile and for the restoration of human rights.

Despite the difficulties the International Commission of Enquiry and the other international bodies preoccupied with the Chilean situation have encountered it has been possible to collect an enormous quantity of evidence regarding the Junta's activities and to prepare useful analyses of their relation to legal and moral standards.

A number of important items are on the agenda of this session, which is the fifth plenary session of the Commission. The question of secretly arrested persons who have disappeared during detention continues to be a question of fundamental importance for our work. Despite the Junta's explanations there are also political prisoners still in detention whose

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situation must be examined. The economic, social and cultural rights of the Chilean people are trampled underfoot by the Junta, and this question deserves careful study and analysis. The so-called referendum organized recently by Pinochet aroused world-wide attention, and public opinion is waiting for concrete information about this event.

I am convinced that this session will be a very useful one contributing to the aims of the Commission. The participation of such an eminent group of international personalities in the work of the Commission and the attendance of a prominent Chilean delegation is a guarantee for the ultimate success of the session.

The general setting of an international gathering like this is always of vital importance. The setting of this session is indeed remarkable. We are working in the very country of solidarity, the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria. The hospitality, support and assistance of our Algerian hosts is difficult to express in words. The International Commission is extremely grateful to the Algerian Government and people for all it has done to secure the organization and success of this meeting. The speech just made by Mr. YAHIAOUI attests to the support which Algeria gives all work of solidarity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare the fifth session of the International Commission of Enquiry opened and I wish you all a session full of harsh and precise facts, of a spirit of friendship and solidarity and of a firm belief in the struggle and ultimate victory of the Chilean people.