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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON EXPERT ON CHILE SEES ARREST OF FORMER DICTATOR AS MESSAGE TO OTHERS

Dayton, Ohio — This week’s arrest of Chile’s former dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, on human rights crimes sends a message that war criminals will “ultimately be brought to justice,” says Mark Ensalaco, a University of Dayton associate professor of political science and director of the school’s international studies program.

“The international community can never lose sight that, for 17 and a half years, the country was ruled by a man who, as a matter of policy, deliberately murdered his own citizens, whom he perceived to be political enemies,” says Ensalaco, author of the soon-to-be-released book *The Policies of Human Rights in Chile (1973-1995)*.

Pinochet’s regime is responsible for the torture, disappearance and murder of 4,000 Chilean citizens during the 1970s and ’80s, offenses for which those involved were granted immunity in their country. Ensalaco was in Chile in 1991 when 128 civilian bodies in 108 coffins were unearthed, with some buried two to a coffin. “When Gen. Pinochet was asked about the bodies, he replied, ‘How very economical.’ This is the type of cruel, sadistic and cynical man we’re dealing with.”

Pinochet’s arrest in London last Saturday was pursued by a Spanish judge seeking the military ruler’s blame in the torture and murder of Spanish citizens during his 17-year reign. The judge cited the Geneva Convention, which allows crimes involving human rights to be tried anywhere and anytime, as giving his country jurisdiction over Pinochet.

The success of Pinochet’s conviction could create a legal precedent and a warning to other war criminals, Ensalaco says.

“As time goes by, if they let down their guard, they will be hunted. Pinochet made a mistake of going to another country on private business — not official, which would have given him immunity from arrest. It’s encouraging that these people have to look permanently over their shoulder for the rest of their days.”

But Ensalaco, executive director of the Inter-American Forum on Human Rights, a
nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to human rights in South America, concedes a “frustrating” irony in the case against one of South America’s most notorious right-wing generals.

“Here’s a man who led a military coup in violation of the country’s constitution, presided over a regime that murdered its citizens, who operated completely outside the rule of law,” Ensalaco explains. “And the truth is, he may not be brought to justice over a legal technicality. But the efforts against him are not persecution under the law but prosecution under the law. He should be tried as a war criminal.”

Despite the likely chance that Pinochet will not be tried, Ensalaco is hopeful that his arrest will fuel, not deplete, the international community’s determination to bring war criminals to justice.

“The broader picture is that we are still pursuing those who have committed crimes against humanity,” he says. “And that, above all, should be applauded. We can never stop pursuing them.”

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