

➤ The Unintended Legacy of September 11, 1973: Transnational Activism and the Human Rights Movement in Latin America

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Abstract: The following article focuses on the impact of the September 11, 1973 coup in Chile on the formation of a transnational human rights network in Latin America. The article discusses the exemplary character of the human rights operations in Chile for other Latin American countries, but focuses on the formation of a transnational infrastructure that stimulated and accompanied the organization of human rights organizations across Latin America. The work of the Latin American churches and their international partners were at the center of the growth of the Latin American human rights movement that began in the 1970s.

Keywords: Human Rights; History; Latin America; Chile; 20th Century.

Resumen: El siguiente artículo se concentra en el impacto que tuvo el golpe de Estado chileno del 11 de septiembre de 1973 en la formación de una red transnacional de derechos humanos en América Latina. El artículo discute el carácter ejemplar que tuvieron las operaciones de derechos humanos en Chile para otros países latinoamericanos, enfocándose en la formación de una infraestructura transnacional que estimuló y acompañó la creación de organizaciones de derechos humanos a lo largo del continente. El trabajo de las Iglesias latinoamericanas y sus aliados internacionales estuvieron en el centro de la expansión del movimiento de derechos humanos que comenzó en los años setenta en América Latina.

Palabras clave: Derechos Humanos; Historia; América Latina; Chile; Siglo xx.

1. Introduction

By the early 1970s, despite almost two decades of existence, the principles and ideas of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had not taken root in Latin American political discourse. The language of human rights did not catch on despite the pervasive authoritarianism of the region, which became accentuated as military coups succeeded each other after the overthrow of João Goulart in Brazil in 1964. Even in Europe and North America the concept of human rights was rather obscure, and in the convulsive years that surrounded 1968 no major movements carried them as a banner. In the late 1960s, Amnesty International was still a movement with a small constituency and an even smaller budget. International standards had nevertheless continued to make progress since

the 1948 Declaration, most notably through the passing of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1966. In Latin America, this process was strengthened by the approval of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights of 1969. However, despite legal advances, the human rights situation had rapidly deteriorated in many Latin American countries, and the rise of military repression was not accompanied by the emergence of human rights organizations in any Latin American country until the Chilean putsch.

Unintentionally, the military coup of September 11, 1973 changed this dynamic as it became a watershed for the advancement of human rights practices. Thereafter human rights organizations would begin to appear *en masse*. From being practically non-existent in 1973, by 1981 there were more than 220 Latin American human rights organizations, and they would reach 550 in 1990 (Keck/Sikkink 1998: 90). The expansion of the human rights agenda not only extended throughout militarized Latin America, but also strengthened the movement in Europe and North America. While Amnesty International had 500 groups and approximately a £20 million budget in 1969, it grew to have more than 1600 groups and an almost £400 million budget in 1976 (Amnesty International 1977: 3). As this paper will show, the increase in repression alone was not the reason for the broadening of the human rights agenda throughout Latin America and the world. Rather, activist international organizations played a crucial role in shaping the Latin American human rights movement, an institutional innovation that grew out of transnational dynamics that converged after the Chilean military coup.

This paper proceeds in three steps. First, I discuss how previous Latin American migratory waves and international conventions set the course for international intervention in Chile after the September 11, 1973 coup. Second, I show how the intervention of activist international actors was important in shifting the initial relief efforts in Chile towards the defense of human rights. And finally, I illustrate how – as a result of the activities conducted in Chile – international organizations learned how to take an activist position on human rights violations and acted to empower human rights actors in other Latin American countries.¹

2. Exiles and Refugees: Setting the course for international intervention

Many observers of the Chilean case have noted that the international reaction to the coup and the subsequent human rights violations was quick, strong and relatively widespread (Hawkins 2002; Ropp/Sikkink 2008). Although authors are quick to signal the transnational character of the outcomes, the explanations regarding the causes of such a response tend to be strictly national. A common assumption is that Chilean human rights

1 This article relies mainly on the documents held in the Archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, in the Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America fund. Documentation concerning the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was accessed at the Library of the United Nations in Geneva. Additional documents for this article were acquired at the *Fundación de Documentación y Archivos de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, which contains the documentation produced by the first and largest human rights organization in Chile, and at the *Centro de Documentación* of the *Museo de la Memoria*, which has recently begun to centralize much of the information from other Chilean human rights organizations. Both archives are located in Santiago de Chile.

organizations were created by local churches – Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Methodist – and the Jewish community as a response to growing repression, and that transnational relations were subsequently established and sustained (Hawkins 2002; Ropp/Sikkink 2008; Wright 2007). However, despite the importance of the local churches in organizing relief for the victims of repression, the initial catalysts for spurring these institutions into action were in fact highly transnational in nature. As this section will show, the international reaction to the Chilean coup was fundamentally motivated by the need to secure the safety of foreign refugees who had begun arriving in Chile in the mid-1960s.

Due to its prolonged institutional and economic stability, Chile had been a haven for Latin American exiles since as early as the nineteenth century. During the state- and nation-building phases of the nineteenth century in Latin America, disputes among elites routinely ended with the sidelined factions having to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Chile received various waves of Argentinean, Peruvian, and Bolivian exiles during the 1830s and 1840s, alongside some prominent intellectuals from other countries of the region such as Colombia, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Sznajder/Roniger 2009: 94-100). Between 1964 and 1973, as military regimes began to proliferate throughout the region, Chile once again began to massively receive Latin American exiles.

With a combination of supportive governing coalitions and the presence of important international institutions, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which had their regional offices in Santiago, Chile became a favored destination for many prominent left-wing politicians. Brazilian exiles, in particular, came to play a predominant role in Chilean politics as ministers of the deposed João Goulart government and Brazilian intellectuals worked as advisors to Allende and found posts in the Chilean government, universities, and international research centers. Celso Furtado, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Darcy Ribeiro, and Paulo Freire were some of the personalities among the almost 4,000 Brazilians that came to Chile to escape the military government (Sznajder/Roniger 2009: 103-104). After the putsch in Uruguay – another important political haven – in early 1973, Latin American exiles increasingly began to seek refuge in Chile. It was estimated that approximately 25,000 persons arrived in the 1964-1973 exile wave.²

Though many of the exiles that found refuge in Chile belonged to the middle and upper classes, and were thus able to live off allowances sent from their families or find well-paid professional positions, most of the exiles were of working-class origins and encountered great difficulties adjusting to their host country (Sznajder/Roniger 2009: 201-202). In light of this situation, President Allende consulted with different ecclesiastical representatives on how to help these exiles adapt to Chilean life. The head of the Chilean Lutheran Church, Bishop Helmut Frenz, established the *Diaconía* in 1970, which served as an institution for social assistance and development and focused especially on supporting the arrival of Latin American exiles (Frenz 2006: 95-97). The work of the *Diaconía* was financed through grants provided by the Church World Service of the US National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).³

2 J. da Silva, “Memorandum to Alan Brash, CICARWS director, concerning fundraising for Chile”, September 19, 1973. Archive of the World Council of Churches. Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America. Box 429.01.04/01. All documents from this archive will onward be identified as AWCC with the corresponding box number.

3 Interview with Charles Harper, Coordinator of the Chile Emergency Desk and Director of the Human

Until April 27, 1972, when Allende subscribed to the 1967 United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the legal status of Latin American exiles in Chile was equivalent to that of immigrants. Thereafter, exiles who applied for refugee status were subject to the guarantees provided by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and fell under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The 1951 Convention was the outcome of international legal mechanisms to respond to the massive displacement of persons that resulted from both world wars and the persecution faced by certain national groups and political activists during Europe's authoritarian backlash in the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, the Convention imposed temporal and geographical limitations on the status of refugees, recognizing as such only those persons who had become refugees in the European crises that occurred before January 1, 1951. The main objective of the 1967 Protocol was therefore to remove these limitations and make the protection of refugees universal. The restrictions of the Convention did not merely pose a semantic problem but also an operative one, since they impeded the effective intervention of the UNHCR – which had a universal mandate – in new cases of massive displacement that began as a result of decolonization in Africa during the 1960s. By expanding the scope of protection for refugees, the 1967 Protocol also imposed on signatory countries the obligation to cooperate with the UNHCR in the exercise of its functions and in particular with the application of the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol.

According to both treaties, a refugee is any person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution” (UNHCR 2010: 14). Being ‘outside’ the country of origin is an intrinsic part of the condition of a refugee, irrespective of the reasons he or she had to leave the country. However, the key idea behind a special status for refugees was the recognition that they are a distinct category of migrants who deserve special attention and help, and who by no means should be sent back to any country where they might fear persecution. In this sense, the most important obligation imposed by the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on signatory host countries is the principle of *non-refoulement*, which prescribes that no refugee should be returned to his or her country of origin or to any country where he or she may be at risk of persecution.⁴

Chile's timely ratification of the 1967 Protocol therefore had profound effects on the unfolding of the events that followed the 1973 military coup, since the international humanitarian response was not triggered first and foremost by widespread violence and repression against Chileans, but was rather a reaction to the presence of the Latin American refugees in Chile and to the obligations of the Chilean state to guarantee their protection in accordance with international agreements.

Rights Resources Office for Latin America of the World Council of Churches. Geneva, Switzerland, March 9 and 10, 2011.

4 On the 1951 Convention see Zimmermann (2011).

The days that succeeded the military coup were characterized by the scarcity of information on the events occurring in Chile. The military junta closed the borders, which stalled the entry of international observers who could transmit reliable information on the situation. The regional representative of the UNHCR, for example, was denied entry on September 15, 1973. Additionally, radio reports received in Europe, which were vividly relayed and discussed by international agencies seeking their confirmation, informed listeners that the military junta had begun “killing refugees/exiles (more or less shooting them on sight)”; was “herding refugees/exiles together, taking them over in buses to (at least two) football stadiums which have been converted into provisional prisoners’ camps”, and was “reiterating that the main urgency and goal of the coup was to get hold of and rid of all the [...] refugees/exiles in Chile.”⁵ Additionally, international agencies were concerned that after detention, the military junta would begin to send exiles and refugees back to their countries of origin.

According to UNHCR figures, by 1973 approximately 15,000 persons were officially registered as refugees in Chile,⁶ many of whom had been helped at some point in their relocation by international organizations such as the UNHCR, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migrations (ICEM).⁷ Since many of these exiles had been opposition leaders in their countries of origin, the military coup in Chile placed them in a particularly difficult position: the risk for them was not only being captured by the Chilean military, but, even worse, the possibility of being handed over to the military regimes from which they had initially fled. And since almost half of the total exile population in Chile was not protected by the refugee conventions, the toppling of the Unidad Popular created an extremely hazardous situation for many exiles. This point was raised in internal communications of the WCC:

Certain persons from those countries [Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay] now residing in Chile are not technically refugees, but there are among them many important and hightanding [sic.] opposition leaders of the countries just mentioned, who would be immediately arrested, perhaps tortured and killed if the regimes in their respective countries get them under their control.⁸

The fears were not unwarranted. Shortly before the coup the slogan “JAKARTA IS THE GOAL”, in reference to the almost 500 thousand people who were killed in Indonesia’s 1965-1966 anticommunist purge, appeared painted across Santiago’s walls. And in its first public statements, the military junta began to identify the Latin American exiles/refugees as the main target of repression by justifying the coup on account of the presence of foreign communist ‘extremists’ in figures that resembled the number of refugees registered by the UNHCR. The regime stated that there were approximately “14,000

5 L.J. Niilus, Director CCIA, “Chile Emergency. New developments. Need for urgent action. Proposals”, Sep 15, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

6 World Council of Churches Communication, “WCC General Secretary urges Chilean Junta to Respect Refugee Rights”, September 14, 1973. AWCC, 429.07.25.

7 L.J. Niilus, Director CCIA, “Memorandum to Philip Potter, WCC General Secretary”, September 14, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

8 L.J. Niilus, Director CCIA, “Memorandum to Philip Potter, WCC General Secretary”, September 14, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

armed extremists in the country”, whose purpose was to “instigate a civil war” (Amnesty International 1974: 64). In his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 1973, the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed that the foreigners’ “sole mission was to set up a parallel army to oppose the regular armed forces.”⁹

In reaction to the atmosphere of extreme xenophobia created by the military junta and to accounts of the deportation of Bolivians to their country of origin,¹⁰ the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadruddin Aga Khan, sent Chile’s Minister of Foreign Relations a telegram reminding him of Chile’s obligations to international conventions and explicitly addressed the principle of *non-refoulement* (UNHCR 1975: 4). This diplomatic exchange was immediately followed by the establishment of coordination between the UNHCR and the junta in order to organize the relocation of foreign refugees. The regional representative of the UNHCR for Latin America, Oldrich Haselman, entered the country as soon as the borders reopened on September 18, 1973 to pressure the military junta to uphold the international protocols and to establish a local office to secure the safe transit of foreign refugees. On September 21, 1973, Haselman met with the Minister of Foreign Relations, where he reiterated the High Commissioner’s appeal. During a second meeting on September 24, the UNHCR representative discussed working modalities with the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Ministry of Interior regarding the procedures for the identification of refugees, the regularization of their situation, and the actions to be taken in case they wished to abandon Chile. By September 25, 1973, these conversations were advanced to the point that the Chilean government agreed to recognize refugee status, and abide by the Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, acceding to cooperate with the international community’s efforts to secure the safety of the foreign refugees residing in Chile.¹¹

In the days that immediately followed the coup, many foreigners sought the help of Bishop Frenz, who had helped them at some point through the work of the *Diaconía*. Haselman, having heard of this work upon his arrival in Chile, contacted Bishop Frenz in order to establish a local committee to handle the tasks involved in the process of refugee relocation. These contacts led to the creation of the *Comité Nacional de Ayuda a los Refugiados* (CONAR). As conversations between the UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the military junta advanced, CONAR was officially authorized on October 3, 1973, by Decree 1308 of the Ministry of the Interior.¹² The decree authorized the Committee to function for a period of three months, until December 31, 1973, and delimited its objectives:

9 Speech before the UN General Assembly reproduced in Birns (1974: 46).

10 “Chile Junta cites threat by aliens”, *The New York Times*, 14.09.1973.

11 N.G. Gussing, Refugee Department CICARWS, “Memorandum to Stanley Mitton concerning refugee status”, September 27, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/02; I. Huerta Díaz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, “Permanent Mission of Chile to the International Organizations in Geneva: Letter concerning refugees in Chile”, October 19, 1973. AWCC, 429.07.25; UNHCR, “Addendum to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; General Assembly, 28th Session”, 1973, p. 26. United Nations Office at Geneva Library (onward UNOG); Interview with Charles Harper, Geneva, Switzerland, March 9 and 10, 2011.

12 CONAR, “Informe Sinóptico del Comité Nacional de Ayuda a los Refugiados”, February, 1974. Centro de Documentación-Museo de la Memoria, Fondo CONAR (onward, CD-MM).

The National Committee for Aid to Refugees will have as its sole purpose to cooperate with the Chilean government in the resolution of the problems which affect the foreign refugees in our country, giving them material aid, helping them to leave the country through legal avenues for the country of their choice, or regularizing their presence in the country (Amnesty International 1974: 65).

CONAR was administered mainly by the Evangelical and Lutheran Churches, while UNHCR experts helped in the more technical aspects of refugee relocation. CONAR had a total of 26 refugee reception centers, 15 located in Santiago and 11 in the provinces, which had the objective of receiving those refugees who felt unsafe, or who were waiting to be relocated to third countries. An additional refuge, placed under the protection of the Swiss Embassy and known as the ‘Swiss house’, was set up to receive the cases of homeless refugees and to grant asylum to the foreigners who were released from the National Stadium with an expulsion order until they could be relocated abroad. Due to the restrictions on movement, CONAR managed almost every activity of the people in their custody, from legal assistance and medical care to leisure and clothing, and also supplied provisions to the embassies that had granted political asylum. There were three departments, under the coordination of an Executive Secretary: a legal department, social aid, and documentation. Between September 13, 1973 and January 31, 1974, CONAR sheltered and secured the safe emigration of 4,442 persons, which included refugees and their families.¹³

3. Shifting the Agenda: from Refugees to Human Rights

While the international community had begun to confront the plight of the Latin American refugees through CONAR, the possibilities of coming to a similar arrangement to help distressed Chileans were remote. The only international legal instrument available for the protection of Chileans in national territory was the 1954 Caracas Convention on Diplomatic Asylum, which granted asylum seekers in foreign embassies protection from the territorial state. Chilean political activists who were aware of this disposition were quick to jump over embassy walls as the coup unfolded. However, since only Latin American countries plus Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti were signatories of the Caracas Convention, this was not a solution that could be used on a larger scale. Additionally, some embassies located in apartments were difficult to access and were guarded to avoid the entrance of asylum seekers. Those who could not make it into the embassies fled the country through clandestine mountain passes into the neighboring countries of Argentina, Peru and Bolivia. In total, approximately 20,000 Chileans fled the country between September 1973 and August 1974.¹⁴

13 CONAR, “Informe Sinóptico del Comité Nacional de Ayuda a los Refugiados”, February, 1974; CONAR, “Informe de la Comisión de Emergencia”, February, 1974; CONAR, “Informe del Departamento de Asistencia Social”, February, 1974. CD-MM.

14 Chile Emergency Office, WCC, “Progress Report, Chile Task Force”, June 22, 1974. AWCC, 429.01.04/01. A 1979 ICEM report estimated that by 1974 there were at least 15,000 Chilean refugees in Argentina and 1,500 in Peru (quoted by Angell 2007: 9).

Nonetheless, the partnerships established by the UNHCR to operate CONAR would prove to be decisive in shifting international support towards defending Chileans who were suffering political persecution. On September 18, 1973, Bishop Helmut Frenz contacted the World Council of Churches in Geneva requesting their support for the relocation of refugees.¹⁵ The WCC became a partner organization in financing the functioning of CONAR and played a major role in establishing refugee centers for the reception of Chileans in Argentina and Peru. A refugee committee in Buenos Aires was formed by church leaders with close contacts to the WCC, and a committee in Lima was formed as a result of requests made by Peruvian officials. By mid-October, the WCC had provided these committees with financial assistance.¹⁶ While CONAR in Santiago was established to manage the cases of foreigners facing problems in Chile, the Argentinean and Peruvian committees became important in receiving many of the Chileans who began crossing the borders fleeing persecution. Other committees to receive Chileans supported by the WCC were established in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Mexico.¹⁷

The WCC had provided relief in other major humanitarian crises even before its official foundation in 1948. Founded by North American and European Protestant churches in Amsterdam, the WCC was the crystallization of a Christian ecumenical movement which postulated the necessity of cooperating across denominational divides and acted under the conviction that theological reflection could not be separated from social action. Before its formal constitution, many of the WCC commissions had already been in place for several years. The Geneva office had a staff of 142 people at the moment of the WCC foundation, and had been coordinating the work of the churches during the Second World War. Its departments played important roles in lobbying for the human rights agenda before the United Nations and responded to major refugee situations, such as the aftermath of World War II, the Palestine partition in 1948-49, and the Korean War in 1950 (Van Elderen 1992: 18-25).

By the 1960s, increasingly influenced by the presence of non-Western points of view, a global perspective began to gain ascendancy in the agenda of the WCC. In 1961, the WCC effectively became a global body through the incorporation of new churches from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and Orthodox churches from the Eastern bloc. The Conference on Church and Society held in Geneva in 1966 to generate reflection about the turbulent social processes occurring throughout the world was crucial for transforming the representation of the WCC's global constituency into policy. The Geneva conference paralleled the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council and, as in its Catholic counterpart, established the necessity of the Churches' commitment with the processes of social change going on in the world, dovetailing the growing influence of Liberation Theology in Latin America. Most of the 420 participants were laypeople, and more than half of them represented Asia, Africa, and Latin America, "making it the first large ecumenical conference in which Western participants were not in the majority" (Van Elderen 1992: 29).

This growing global representation was also reflected in the composition of the WCC's Geneva staff. Since the governing bodies of the WCC only met every couple of years to

15 L.J. Niilus, Director CCIA, "Chile Emergency. Followup", Sep 18, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

16 N.G. Gussing, Refugee Department CICARWS, "Letter to CICARWS related agencies on Chile appeal", October 18, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/02.

17 Chile Task Force, "WCC Report of the WCC Emergency Task Force on the Chilean Situation for Unit II Meeting in West Berlin, August 7-9, 1974". [around August 1974]. AWCC, 429.02.01.

analyze the work and set guidelines for future actions, the Geneva office had the crucial task of carrying out the daily activities that allowed the programs to function. By the time of the Chilean coup in 1973, the Geneva office of the WCC had a large number of Latin Americans “in positions of influence and power”.¹⁸ The presence of the Latin American staff in the WCC is particularly important in explaining the organization’s participation with CONAR.

Already before the first formal contacts with Bishop Frenz were established, the Latin American staff of the WCC mobilized “to help those most seriously threatened by the junta in their first official declarations: the foreign residents in Chile.”¹⁹ This interest was motivated by both affective and ideological affinities. Argentinean, Brazilian, and Uruguayan exiles were part of the WCC’s Geneva staff, and they and their personal networks in Europe and North America were keen on securing the safety of their countrymen and women. Additionally, the staff was concerned about leftist church leaders and church members who had been helped to move to Chile through its refugee program, escaping persecution in their own countries. Finally, the mainly progressive staff of the WCC was worried about the safety of Chilean ecclesiastical leaders and church members who had been supportive of the Allende government.

In their cooperation with CONAR, an agency with semi-autonomous stature, the WCC was officially recognized by the military junta. This recognition would facilitate the entrance of the WCC delegations that visited Chile during the four months that the refugee operation lasted. On September 25 1973, Theo Tschuy, a Swiss national, and Director of the *Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz* (HEKS), and Annie Went van der Wring, Director of the Dutch Interchurch Agency for Refugees, left for Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Lima with the task of consulting with church leaders and meeting with the representatives of international organizations in Santiago to coordinate and define the strategy for the Chile refugee situation.²⁰ Furthermore, the Tschuy-Went mission had the task of coordinating the churches in Argentina and Peru, and their respective governments, for the reception of exiles arriving from Chile.²¹

The general impressions of the situation provided by the Tschuy-Went report were extremely acute in signaling how the divisions of the Cold War were reflected in Chile. As it claimed that Santiago looked like an occupied city, the report indicated that the “most terrible aspect of this all-embracing campaign of terror [were] the on-the-spot executions most of which take place during the curfew hours at night.”²² The report, however, was also clear in highlighting the selective class composition of repression by signaling that the display of raw-power was more visible in the poor neighborhoods than in the upper-class sectors of the city. By contrast, the coup had brought relief to the inhabitants of Santiago’s rich neighborhoods, “where the social power base of the Chilean right

18 Interview with Charles Harper, Geneva, Switzerland, March 9 and 10, 2011.

19 D. Epps, CCIA, “Memorandum. Notes on Chile to Philip Potter, WCC General Secretary”, January 25, 1974. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

20 S. Mitton, Emergencies Officer, WCC, “Letter to Cornelius Koch of Solidarité Chrétienne, Fribourg”, September 26, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/01.

21 S. Mitton, Emergencies Officer, WCC, “Letter to CICARWS related agencies on developments in Chile and funding”, September 20, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.04/02.

22 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, “Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973”, [around October 1973], p. 5. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

is concentrated (National Party, Christian Democrats)”, by ending “the ‘nightmare’ of Allende’s Unidad Popular.”²³ These perceptions helped shape the opinion of ambassadors of important Western countries through the close social contacts they established with the Chilean upper class:

As foreign embassies are located in the Barrio Alto [upper-class neighborhoods] and their local contacts limited to members of the middle and upper classes, we found that the view of diplomats we met reflected faithfully the ideas of these surroundings. The European embassies obstinately refused to take into account the fate of refugees and Chileans in danger, under the pretext that they have received no instruction from home. They themselves seemed to take no initiative to inform themselves properly and to request to inform their respective home government to consider humanitarian action. The Swiss ambassador, Mr. Masset, told us clearly that if he accepted refugees the local Swiss colony would be angered. Only as he began to realize that his attitude might result in bad publicity back home, he softened his stand slightly. Other embassies reacted similarly.”²⁴

This passage reveals much about the interaction between the national and the international level. Despite the widespread international condemnation of the military takeover, the local response of foreign delegates was rather reflective of the Chilean power structures. The solidarity expressed by many foreign delegations was more in tune with their conservative local base, and their structure of relations, than with what could be considered universal principles of human welfare.²⁵

The Tschuy-Went report, however, not only gave a critical appraisal of the general state of affairs in Chile, but also fundamentally redefined the intervention of the WCC in their cooperation with local partners. This was reflected in the apprehensions expressed in the report regarding the limitations the UNHCR mandate imposed on the actions of the CONAR and, hence, on the WCC:

The government has set a 3-month time limit for the Committee to remove the refugees. After that the Committee will apparently cease to exist, as it is not permitted to help Chilean nationals wishing to go abroad. With other words, this Committee has no authority –and probably no [other] desire than to function strictly within the limits set by the UNCHR’s [sic.] mandate and the rules drawn by the Junta. It is this complete identification of purpose of a Christian and now WCC national committee to the UNHCR and the Junta which causes us concern.²⁶

23 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, “Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973”, [around October 1973], p.5. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

24 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, “Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973”, [around October 1973], p. 5. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

25 The Swedish embassy, with its ambassador Mr. Edelstam, was a notable exception to this. Immediately after the coup, the Swedish government took over the protection of the Cuban representation in Chile thus securing the safety of their diplomats, and of the people who had sought refuge there, and was actively engaged in guaranteeing the safety of foreign refugees. On the latter see *International Herald Tribune*, 27.11.1973. Other European embassies that were receptive of people seeking asylum were Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Finland.

26 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, “Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973”, [around October 1973], p. 6. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

The report therefore emphasized the inconvenient position in which the international community's efforts were placed through its cooperation with the refugee committee, and the scarce effects this would have in providing assistance to Chileans suffering persecution. First, because it was in the junta's interest to have the refugees taken out of the country, which would have the immediate effect of reducing the tension with the international community and, therefore, the presence and oversight of the UNHCR was seen by the military government as a functional intervention. Second, the mandate of the UNHCR followed strict guidelines which were based on the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status, approved by UN member states, and stressed the non-political nature of its involvement. This course of action reflected the multilateral character of the UNHCR, where the Chilean government had access to the information of its formal activities through the participation of observers in the sessions of the UNHCR Executive Committee (UNHCR 1974). These characteristics limited the scope of action of CONAR, being reduced strictly to humanitarian aid along UNHCR principles.²⁷ Following these guidelines, Chileans who needed to seek asylum and those forced to stay in the country were extremely neglected. Third, the strict control imposed by the military on the refugee operation also had the effect of scaring off those foreigners who might be privileged targets: "They fear [...] arrest, forcible repatriation, or worse."²⁸ CONAR's operation therefore did not actually serve those foreign refugees who were most seriously threatened.

The Tschuy-Went report picked up on this right-left tension within the operation they were helping to carry out. The document expressed their concern regarding some of the people in charge of the refugee committee. The Executive Secretary of CONAR, Samuel Nalegash, and Gustav Zeppelin, the Chilean-German representative of the *Diaconía*, were especially distrusted by the members of the WCC mission because of their open support for the military junta. Also, the sympathy for the military regime expressed by many Chilean church leaders attracted the concern of the WCC delegation. When Tschuy read them the cable sent to Pinochet by the WCC General Secretary, the church leaders reacted by strongly criticizing the tone used by the WCC against the military junta. After this encounter with Chilean church leaders, the Tschuy-Went report concluded that right-wing positions were "gaining ascendance in the Chilean churches"²⁹ and that sectors of the left – such as Christians for Socialism – would basically have to retreat in the new scenario.

This reading of the circumstances had a profound effect on setting the course of action for the following months. Although the WCC would continue to help in the refugee operation, the attention of the Geneva teams would be redirected toward the dangers faced by Chileans. To this purpose, the Tschuy-Went delegation contacted Catholic Bishop Fernando Ariztía to start the conversation on forming a commission to address the human rights problem. Mgr. Ariztía recalled this episode:

27 "In endorsing the general policy followed by the High Commissioner, several members of the Committee stressed that the attainment of the UNHCR's objective was largely due to the careful, strictly non-political, humanitarian and unbiased approach observed by the Office in dealing with refugee problems which themselves were often of a highly complex and delicate nature" (UNHCR 1973: 7).

28 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, "Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973". [around October 1973], p. 6. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

29 Tschuy, [HEKS] and Went, "Tschuy/Went Report, September-October 1973". [around October 1973], p. 6. AWCC, 429.01.05/01.

A commission from the World Council of Churches came around September 25 of 1973; this is, about two weeks after the coup. They came to talk to me; I was the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago's Western Zone [...]. They said: "look, the problem with the foreigners will be solved in a couple of months, but the problem that is still unsolved is the problem with the Chileans. So it would be convenient to create a more stable organism, more permanent to tend to the Human Rights violations" (Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad 2002: 13).

Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez authorized the Catholic Church's involvement and appointed Ariztía as his representative. Soon after, on October 4, 1973, the *Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile* (COPACHI) was formed with the participation of the Lutheran, Methodist, and Orthodox Churches, and the head of the Jewish community. The WCC appointed Rev. Frenz as their representative on the Committee, he shared his duties with Mgr. Ariztía. By January 1974, this committee was receiving increasing economic support from the WCC, after the refugee operation had more or less come to a close. The WCC had thus effectively shifted its line of work within Chile from the refugee to the human rights problem.

4. From Chile to Latin America: The Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America

The strategy to support COPACHI through increased technical and financial help proved successful in the short-term. In less than nine months, the Committee grew to reach a staff of 135 persons who worked in 23 offices throughout Chile, and in the first semester of 1974 attended more than 12,000 cases which ranged from arbitrary dismissals to disappearances. In 1975, COPACHI had a 180-person staff in Santiago alone, and another 160 persons worked in 22 offices across the country.³⁰ That year, the departments for social assistance, legal aid, and labor issues handled more than 20,000 cases, and the health program provided medical assistance to more than 60,000 people (COPACHI 1975: Annex 2.1). In its short career, COPACHI became a model for defending human rights in sites of repression.

The shift towards upholding human rights on the ground, however, would not only have consequences for Chile, but also for the rest of Latin America. As the programs in Chile consolidated, so did their coordination within the World Council of Churches. Initially, the WCC's response to Chile had been conducted under the coordination of the Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the Argentinean Leopoldo Nilus, and a group of staffers who had connections with Latin America. However, since the scope of the WCC's involvement rapidly expanded to include the refugee centers in Argentina and Peru, the *ad hoc* nature of the first team quickly became obsolete. The first WCC delegation, and the logistics and coordination required for their success, prompted the need to revise the initial arrangements. This gave

30 Sub-Committee on International Organizations of the House of Representatives, "Chile: La situación de los derechos humanos y su relación con los programas de asistencia económica de los Estados Unidos. Declaración de José Zalaquett", May 5, 1976, p. 20. Fundación de Documentación y Archivos de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

way to the creation of the 'Chile Task Force' which had "two clearly defined responsibilities: a) That of formulation of policy guidelines [...]; b) Attend to practical and operational details such as communications at all levels of WCC membership, contacts, etc., concrete and urgent response to the refugee situation, and coordination and action of all these interrelated activities."³¹

These activities proved to be unmanageable for the members of the Chile Task Force, who in addition to the handling of the Chilean cases also had to carry out their day-to-day activities at the WCC. In November 1973, as the WCC prepared to send a second delegation to Chile, Argentina, and Peru, a small office was created to be occupied solely by those handling the Chile emergency programs – as the refugee and human rights operations in Chile were called within the organization. This office was called the Chile Emergency Desk and was staffed by a coordinator and a secretary to administer all the information regarding the Chilean coup that went in and out of the WCC. The Chile Task Force took on a new role, being a source of counsel and support, but removed from the day-to-day activities of the Chile programs. The Chile Emergency Desk gave the international support of the Chilean organizations a new dimension, by establishing a stable channel of communication between international agencies and people willing to work for the defense of human rights on the ground. Consequently, funding became stabilized through annual funding provided by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). As 1973 drew to a close, the participation of the WCC in Chile, which was not thought to last beyond the three months the refugee operation required, had created an institutionalized channel of communication and support between Europe and Latin America.

The financial consolidation of the Chile Emergency Desk and the increasing repression in Latin America produced the final institutional rearrangement within the WCC. In early 1974, after the programs in Chile had stabilized and the initial sense of emergency wound down, the Coordinator of the Chile Emergency Desk, Charles Harper, exchanged thoughts with the Deputy Director of the Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugees and World Service (CICARWS), Graeme Jackson, regarding possible institutional steps to be taken, especially to address the deteriorating situation of human rights in Latin America. The WCC's response to the Chilean case was seen as a model that could be replicated in other Latin American countries, and a new institutional structure would be required to carry out this task. These reflections led to the creation of the Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America (HRROLA). Between 1975 and 1991, despite its obscure name and its extremely low profile, HRROLA was a major player in coordinating responses to gross human rights violations, by providing technical expertise or providing the resources required for the organization of human rights organisms, and in the dissemination of information that increased awareness about human rights violations in Latin America.

HRROLA was conceived to be, at once, an organ for theoretical reflection and operative involvement. The Chile Task Force's experience of analysis and decision-making was seen as a positive model in this respect. Additionally, it was thought best that it not have a fixed agenda, and rather act – again taking the Chilean case as a model – on an ad hoc basis "to maintain flexibility to respond quickly to situations in a political context to which

31 J. da Silva, "Confidential/Urgent Memorandum to WCC staff regarding creation of a Chile Task Force", Oct 2, 1973. AWCC, 429.01.08.

the churches, and the WCC, should be sensitive.”³² First, the mandate of the HRROLA would be to continue the work of the Chile Emergency Desk, supporting and allocating funds for the COPACHI, disengaging itself however from the refugee cases that were still pending. The focus was thus strictly on human rights. Second, the HRROLA would have an expanding mandate insofar as it was constituted to address problems that had not yet arisen, but were foreseeable in the near future, as could be observed towards 1975 in the growing right-wing paramilitary activity in Argentina. Third, its task was to develop new and efficient “operational ‘contingency plans’ [...] for groups and persons who will be in tight spots, in other Latin American countries than just Chile.”³³ Fourth, it was to be a resource in documentation for international organizations and decision-making within the WCC. The material would not be produced, but would rather be synthesized, made available, and sometimes even prompted by HRROLA. Finally, HRROLA sought to support the organization of Latin American exiles and refugees in Europe, and participate in the passing of legislation to better their situation. The remainder of this section will provide examples of this cooperation with cases from Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

The Uruguayan military dictatorship, which began in July 1973, did not raise much international attention. However, Uruguay’s vibrant progressive ecumenical community represented in the *Iglesia Evangélica Metodista del Uruguay* (IEMU) and in the ecumenical organization *Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina* (ISAL) helped establish international ties early in the crisis. Since the mid-1960s Uruguay had been a haven for Brazilian exiles, most notably due to the presence in the country of the deposed president João Goulart. After Uruguay’s coup, many of the Uruguayan ecumenical leaders were forced into exile, and some were appointed to positions in international ecumenical organizations. In 1973 pastor Emilio Castro took a post as Director of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, and later succeeded Philip Potter as General Secretary of the organization in 1985.

These close ties between the Uruguayan Methodists and the international ecumenical movement, and the Chilean precedent, facilitated the work of IEMU, with the cooperation of UNHCR and CICARWS, in the relocation of Uruguayans abroad in 1974. Further transnational efforts concentrated on providing assistance to political prisoners and their families, and on increasing awareness of repression in Uruguay among the international community. The HRROLA contributed financial and material assistance for the families of political prisoners through the parish work of the Methodist pastors Ademar Olivera and Óscar Bolioli, and the *Oficina de Asesoramiento y Administración de Proyectos Ecuménicos Latinoamericanos* (OAAPEL). In 1974, due to increasing threats against them in Uruguay, the OAAPEL moved its offices to Buenos Aires. When the coup in Argentina occurred in 1976, Oscar Bolioli, who had been an active participant in the Chilean refugee operations, helped Argentineans escape the country to Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Canada, the latter due to the convenience of a direct Buenos Aires-Toronto flight (Olivera 2009: 120-121). The WCC also invested considerable resources to support

32 C. Harper, Coordinator Chile Emergency Office, “Memorandum from Charles Harper to Graeme Jackson with notes regarding the creation of a Human Rights Office at the WCC”, February 1, 1974, p. 5. AWCC, 429.02.01.

33 C. Harper, Coordinator Chile Emergency Office, “Memorandum from Charles Harper to Graeme Jackson with notes regarding the creation of a Human Rights Office at the WCC”, February 1, 1974, p. 3. AWCC, 429.02.01.

a program to heighten awareness of the Uruguayan military dictatorship in Europe. A group of Argentinean, Brazilian, and French lawyers and jurists joined their Uruguayan colleagues to create the International Secretariat of Jurists for Amnesty and Democracy in Uruguay, which organized high-profile international conferences, issued newsletters, and lobbied for the support of European politicians to isolate the Uruguayan military regime (Harper 2006: 22-23).

The country that most quickly benefitted from the human rights infrastructure established after the Chilean military coup was Argentina. The Chilean exiles that began to flee across the border prompted the creation of the *Comité Argentino para los Refugiados* (CAREF) in late 1973, organized on the initiative of the WCC, represented by Theo Tschuy, and the Argentinean Methodist and Lutheran Churches, and the Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata, all directly affiliated to the WCC. CAREF was a forerunner of the *Asamblea Permanente de los Derechos Humanos* (APDH), founded in 1975, and the *Movimiento Ecueménico de Derechos Humanos* (MEDH), founded just a few days before the military coup in Argentina on March 19, 1976. Pastor José de Luca, of the MEDH, recalled “how Argentineans had been warned and taught to be ready for the repression which was coming, by the very fact that Argentina had taken into its midst during the previous three years the Uruguayan and Chilean refugees, who became in a real sense, their mentors” (Harper 2006: 49). However, the Argentinean organizations not only benefitted from the Chilean and Uruguayan experience, but also from their transnational networks. HRROLA provided these organizations with moral and financial support. The WCC later also supported the organization and work carried out by the *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*.

HRROLA’s cooperation in Brazil had traits resembling the efforts in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. While the actions of HRROLA in Uruguay and Argentina starkly relied on the action of the WCC member churches, in Chile the collaboration with the Catholic Church was more intense. HRROLA thus engaged in the efforts of the ecumenical communities of the Brazilian Northeast to disseminate information on repression around the world, and contributed moral and financial assistance to help political prisoners. With the help of HRROLA, a human-rights awareness-raising campaign was launched in 1975 by the *Coordenadoria Ecueménica de Serviço* (CESE). Thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, accompanied by biblical quotations and theological references, were published and circulated among the churches of every Brazilian state (Harper 2006: 9). With a vast Catholic constituency and the presence of progressive bishops in key regions, the WCC’s cooperation in Brazil also concentrated on establishing ties with key Catholic leaders, such as the Archbishop of Recife, Dom Helder Camara, and the Cardinal Archbishop of São Paulo, Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns. Initially, in 1977, the Archbishopric of São Paulo set up a special team, named CLAMOR, to receive Argentinean, Uruguayan, and Chilean exiles escaping from Argentina who did not want authorities to have knowledge of their presence (Frühling/Alberti/Portales 1989: 98). The group used many of the tactics that had been tested by COPACHI in helping Chileans and Latin American exiles secretly leave Chile.

The most important cooperation project between the WCC and the Brazilian Catholic Church was the production of the book *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, which unveiled the systematic nature and pervasiveness of torture in Brazil. Under the sponsorship of Cardinal Arns, a group of lawyers and researchers systematically surveyed official records from

the military courts to expose the repressive mechanisms the military regime used against its political opponents. The project began with the visit of Eny Raimundo Moreira, a Brazilian lawyer, to the Geneva headquarters of the WCC. From 1979 to 1985, “under the strictest secrecy”, the WCC harnessed and channeled the totality of the financial resources required for the fulfillment of this project. The group working on the project in Brazil took almost one year to clandestinely photocopy more than a million pages of court records, which were then analyzed and dissected by the team over the next four years. “To back up their work all files were regularly and systematically microfilmed and secretly smuggled out of the country to Geneva” (Harper 2006: 14). The book, with prologues by the WCC General Secretary, Philip Potter, and Cardinal Arns, was published in Brazil in 1985, becoming an instant bestseller.

5. Conclusions

A notable unintended consequence of the September 11, 1973 coup was the development of a human rights movement that grew out of progressive church networks. The presence in Chile of almost 25,000 Latin American refugees who had fled from the military regimes in their own countries led to the intervention of international actors in Chilean territory, and provided an opening for the beginning of a forthright activist stance against repression in dictatorial Chile. In this sense, the participation of the WCC in the refugee operation was instrumental for encouraging the creation of a church-based human rights organization, COPACHI, and establishing the international contacts required for its functioning. This maneuver proved to be crucial in shifting the international agenda towards defending the human rights of Chileans.

The approach of the WCC was thus in many respects different from the response of other international organizations and solidarity groups to the situation in Chile. While many groups acting internationally limited their role to awareness-raising and public denunciation on an international level, the WCC’s Chile Emergency Office would fundamentally help create and sustain a source of human rights defense *within* Chile. Its role therefore differed from that of other international organizations and groups in the sense that it would not only appeal to international publics, or to the Chilean national government, but would also assume an operative role in helping create and sustain organizations in authoritarian Chile. Thus, the Chilean crisis laid the foundations of what came to be a center of sustained transnational and transcontinental relations in the promotion and defense of human rights. The fact that the Chilean human rights organizations were not a conscious product that the actors had in mind at the time of the coup, and were rather the outcome of a series of redefinitions as the central problems evolved, was related to their unprecedented character. In this sense, the organizations that sprung to life in Chile were an institutional innovation from which Latin American activists as well as international organizations could draw experience and served as models that were replicated across the continent.

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