

Pinochet-era victims exhumed in Chile

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SANTIAGO, Chile --Authorities on Tuesday began exhuming the remains of dozens of victims of repression under the 1973-90 dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet in a renewed effort to determine their identities.

The remains of 13 people were unearthed with help from three foreign experts on the first day of exhumations ordered by Judge Carlos Gajardo. Some of the remains are being uncovered for a second time after the coroner's office acknowledged last year that the misidentified remains of some victims were handed to the wrong relatives.

The victims were originally buried in unmarked tombs at Santiago's General Cemetery in the first few weeks after the bloody 1973 coup led by Pinochet. Some coffins contained the remains of two victims.

Forensic bungling during the first exhumation forced families to relive their grief and outraged the nation. The coroner's office said 48 of the 126 bodies exhumed from the cemetery since 1991 were misidentified. In 67 other cases, officials were either not able to identify the bodies or had doubts about the identities. Only 11 bodies were identified correctly.

Because of those failures, the judge decided to call three foreign experts to help with the new exhumations, said Maria Luisa Sepulveda, a social worker appointed by the government to follow the process. She said the samples of the human remains may be sent abroad for tests.

According to a report prepared by an independent commission appointed by the civilian government that succeeded Pinochet in 1990, a total of 3,190 people were killed for political reasons during his long reign, and 1,197 were arrested and never seen again.

Fewer than 200 of the missing have been accounted for properly.

Pinochet died in December at age 91.