



*DELEGATES: Tina Rosenberg of the US and Wiktor Osiatynski of Poland.*

nine-man junta, involving about 300 witnesses who one after the other gave evidence about some 700 charges of illegal detention, murder, torture and kidnapping – the legal term for what had been called, simply, “disappearances”.

The 1985 trial, which began two years after the elected government came to power, followed due legal process and ended in the acquittal of most members of the junta for lack of evidence.

However, under great pressure from the military, the new government backtracked, passing new laws that made it very difficult to prosecute any military personnel other than security chiefs.

In Chile, when the military dictatorship ended in 1990, the new government appointed an eight-person commission to record the crimes against humanity committed since the military coup in 1973. For a year the commission took its brief nation-

wide, talking to every victim’s family, perusing court records, even interviewing members of the military, who were forced to cooperate.

Jose Zalaquett, a member of that commission, told the conference “this was a very important healing process. Persons who once had been shunted away from the official buildings were now received with dignity. They were offered a cup of coffee, the Chilean flag was there and an official commission was listening to them with due respect.

“They broke down in these offices and this was the first time that people started crying. When you are confronting arrogance you don’t cry. You face it. But you can afford yourself a measure of relief under these very different circumstances.”

The end result was a 900-page document that was published as a book and sent with a personal letter from the president to every affected family. The report also made

detailed provision for compensation for scholars, reparations.

The trial in New York and Weschler, a country where before it had been a nation having a beach”.

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# State security files

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This policy indicates a successful approach to dealing with a grim past. So many documents were retrieved that, placed next to each other, they cover a distance of 180km. More than 3 000 people are employed to deal with the files, and the project has a budget of about R5 million.

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, however, the issue of secret files has been less satisfactory. In Bulgaria, according to lawyer and human rights activist Dimitrina Petrova, who was mandated by the Bulgarian parliament to uncover secret files, it proved to be an impossibly unwieldy task.

"We discovered a complicated system of archives located in different institutions and duplicated in some obscure way. It was very chaotic and quite discouraging to me personally."

She said names and allegations said to be from the files were released to the public in a haphazard and unsubstantiated way, sensationalised to the point that they lost credibility, and overplayed to the extent that the response was increasingly one of public indifference. Some even thought that those formerly in power may have had a hand in this project of trivialisation.

*'Although the government agreed to halt the shredding of security files, Currin was told by an office furniture store manager of a sudden increase in government orders for shredding machines'*

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She regrets lost opportunities. "I feel guilty in some way listening to the success story of Germany," she says. But regret is tempered by realism. The files could not be relied upon for reconstructing the past: "Some were destroyed or tampered with, new ones appeared naming current political opponents.

"The first generation of anti-communist opponents somehow overlooked the issue of the files. We thought this was a dirty game; it was something obscene with which no one with any self-respect would concern themselves."

Brian Currin of Lawyers for Human Rights said South Africa ran the risk of following the Bulgarian route. He referred to an application by his organisation to halt the destruction of National Intelligence Service files. Although the government agreed to halt the shredding, Currin was told by an office furniture store manager of a sudden increase in government orders for shredding machines.

Ethical, legal and procedural questions exist around the reliability of old security files. Karel Schwarzenberg, former adviser to Czech president Vaclav Havel, spoke of the tragedy caused when the contents of files in former Czechoslovakia began to be leaked.

**Models of local government  
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world, all have someth  
Africa's development. Idasa  
on a fact-**

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**D**IFFERENT cities have different government. As part of the process, Idasa, together with Research and the Development Agency of rapidly urbanising, racially diverse South Africans explore and learn from

Thirty people involved in the Forum spent January visiting a range of cities ranging from New York to Asmara, an innovative approach to local government.

Each participant visited three cities: either Dakar or Asmara in Africa; or Toronto in North America; and London in Europe. The aim was to study the kinds of urban development, human resource arrangements that would best suit

Asmara, capital city of Eritrea, is a city of palm trees and graceful old buildings with a rich cultural heritage. Population of the city is 500 000.

Committed to avoiding unemployment, a policy of radically restricting growth. The country may be built in Asmara or other cities. It is to be the focus of future investment. The economy is being decentralised and various cities are being developed around the capital.

The Eritrean experience is now a success story and a model for the rest of Africa. For Africans it is a humbling and enlightening experience.

The country has only just emerged from a long war with Ethiopia, finally winning independence. Ninety percent of Eritreans voted for self-determination in a Nations-monitored referendum.

And yet, apart from destroyed buildings, "graveyards" full of rusting military equipment. I don't believe that one of Africa's most beautiful cities two years ago. There were no soldiers. The group were carried by a police officer and a soldier. It was the safest city the group visited.

Eritrea underwent a remarkable transformation. Except for those remaining in the