

Spain asks UK: where's illicit Pinochet cash?

As the former Chilean dictator is sued by his victims, **Hugh O'Shaughnessy** asks if Britain and America will finally now address the small matter of his ill-gotten gains

AS VICTIMS of Augusto Pinochet in Spain target him with a civil suit for genocide and torture, the Spanish Government is asking its British counterpart and the governor of the British Virgin Islands, the Caribbean tax haven, for more information about the movement of the former dictator's ill-gotten cash.

On October 19, the Spanish courts declared an international embargo on his assets and is in the process of having this enforced worldwide.

Having been arrested in London in 1998, Pinochet was allowed to fly back to Chile by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in March 2000 on health grounds which were widely thought to be bogus.

The Spanish prosecutors are inviting the British, Chilean and US Governments to comply with their treaty obligations on penal matters and freeze Pinochet's assets on their territory.

A fair chunk of Pinochet's assets, estimated to be between \$50 million and \$100 million, are known to have been sent to the British Virgin Islands – the tiny colony administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Other sums were lodged in the London branch of Riggs, a United States bank in Piccadilly.

One of the most notorious US depositories for his cash was the Riggs Bank in Washington, where

Pinochet is provisionally estimated to have put 10.3 million euro. This year, a US congressional investigation of Riggs' close financial relationship with Pinochet and other dictators such as President Nguema of Equatorial Guinea caused embarrassment in Britain. On November 3 last year, Sir Christopher Meyer, a former ambassador in Washington and currently chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, joined its board.

Meanwhile, a new Chilean report on Pinochet's 17-year dictatorship (he seized power in 1973), due to be published next month by the National Commission on Political Prisoners and Torture, indicates that torture was much more widespread than earlier investigations concluded.

The commission was charged with identifying those who had been tortured so they could qualify for small symbolic compensation payment.

Nine out of ten of the 23,000 men, women and children arrested by the Chilean military were found to have been tortured.

The commission found that pregnant women were tortured so routinely that its members debated whether those born after their mothers' torture could qualify for the compensation. It decided that they shouldn't.

And whereas earlier Chilean



investigations estimated that only some 300 sites had been used to house political prisoners the true figure was found to have been around 1,200. The report will also reveal that the navy's training ship, Esmeralda, had been used as a torture centre. The Chilean officers

vehemently denied protesters' charges to that effect when the Esmeralda featured in a tall ships regatta in the Mersey.

The hundreds of victims held on board included the Anglo-Chilean Michael Woodward, who was later murdered.