

SEPTEMBER 11, 2003 VIGIL to commemorate the overthrow of the government of Chile on September 11, 1973 .

September 12, 2003 by Theresa Wolfwood, VIPIRG coord member. See also: [www.islandnet.com/~bbcf](http://www.islandnet.com/~bbcf)  
Last night about 100 Chilean-Canadians and their friends and supporters gathered on the causeway of the inner harbour of our beautiful city, Victoria, Canada. The sun was setting over the Pacific as artists hung long paintings of Chilean people and words of remembrance for September 11, 1973.

This event, as were hundreds of others worldwide, was videoed to be part of a film of global solidarity. We had greetings from our City Council and thanks from a friend who spoke about the contribution of culture, knowledge and commitment that Chileans had given to Canada.

Several speakers spoke of their experiences during and after the military coupe and told stories of friends who died or disappeared.

We cried and sang together and after a moment of silence in the early darkness, candles were lit and placed before a photo of Salvador Allende and my banner with the words in Spanish and Portuguese of Pablo Neruda, "Action is The Mother of Hope".

I was honoured to be one of few people, not of Chilean descent, who was invited to speak.

Here are my words: Friends, Companeras,

Today we meet to bring truth to word: WE ARE THE KEEPERS OF OBSTINATE MEMORY. The tragedy of 30 years ago is in our hearts today. We remember the victims and we remember the truth of the USA planned and supported military coupe that overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and the continuing terror of a regime that lasted 17 years, that still has power in the present.

In the words of Sola Sierra, President of the Families of the Disappeared, (El Siglo, February 20, 1998), "*Memory helps people so that the same crimes are not repeated; calling things by their real name, saying a criminal is a criminal... The worst that could occur in Chile is to think that by forgetting we will do away with the problem.*"

I am holding an ARPILLERA. A simple hand stitched appliqué made by women – the widows, mothers, sisters and orphans of those thousands who died and disappeared September 11, 1973 and in the years following. These women came together in their grief to create these works of art, to comfort and support each other, to keep hope and memory alive, to help them and their families survive. They were sent out across the world and carried their eloquent messages better than words. Only a few were signed; this was subversive art which sustained memory.

This arpillera was made by Ruth, a woman I think of as my sister. I think of her sewing as she thought of her children and asked the still asked question: DONDE ESTAN: Where are they? These pictures of scenes of life under the military terror were a constant memory to us far away, of an unimaginable horror, over the years as we send back our messages and support to them. Ruth – I hope that by now you have had some answer to your question. Thank you for your art, thank you sisters, for the art of obstinate memory.

In his last speech to the nation before he was murdered the president said – among other words of love and thanks to his people: *I address myself above all to the modest woman of our country, to the peasant woman who believed in us, to the working woman who worked more, to the mother who knew of our concern for her children. I address myself to the professionals of our land, to the patriotic professionals, to those who were working against the sedition carried out by the professional schools, class-ridden schools which defend the advantages which capitalist society gives them. Long live Chile! Long live the People! Long live the Workers! These are my last words. I am sure that my sacrifice will not be in vain.*

Immediately, thousands were imprisoned in ships, jails and camps, including the National Stadium. There was Victor Jara, the popular singer of the people. He sang for his comrades in the stadium until the soldiers broke his hands, he continued singing until they killed him – and thousands more. Here are some of his words, so we know why he had to be killed because love and hope are dangerous in the time of tyrants.

*The star of hope Continues to be ours*

*They scatter my heart*

*And this poet will go on singing*

*As long as my spirit breathes,*

*Down the roads of the people - Both now and forever.*

And many others died in the days following. I want us to hold in hearts-

Carmen Gutiérrez Soto, 14, a high school student. Her relatives say that on September 13, 1973, she and a sister took advantage of the fact permission had been given to people to leave their houses to buy some groceries. There were many people in line at the bakery. Suddenly the bread supply gave out, and the people began to protest. A police van pulled up to bring matters under control. The police began to disperse the crowd and shot into the air. Everyone began to run, but Carmen fell to the ground. One of her brothers found her with a bullet wound on the back of her head. The relatives say it was very difficult to get permission to have her buried; they did not have a death certificate since the body had been picked up on a public thoroughfare. They say that a doctor at the Barros Luco Hospital later helped them and wrote them a certificate stating that the cause of death was "rheumatic fever." Thus they were able to bury her.

This week as we remember Chile, we must recognize the constant universality of this continuing struggle for justice, truth and life. When I think of Carmen I think of a student I met in Iraq. Shaima was an English student at university. A year ago she wrote to me and sent me her graduation photo. She wrote about her hopes for marriage and work. I have never heard from Shaima again.

Aya Fayad was one little girl out of one million eighty-five thousand Palestinian children, who should have been at school on September 1 this year. She wasn't there. According to her mother, Om Isam, little eight year-old Aya was excitedly awaiting the first day of the school year. She was delighted with her new books, and for days she had insisted on carrying her new school bag, and wearing the new clothes her mother had bought in preparation. But Om Isam's youngest daughter did not go to school with her five sisters and friends, because Aya was shot by Israeli soldiers in Khan Yunis, where she was riding her bicycle. Aya died instantly.

We cannot forget that in Chile in 1973, while the military were ruthlessly killing and torturing, the great poet and ambassador, Pablo Neruda, (whose words are on my banner) lay sick in his bed. The military raided and searched his home, he was denied medical attention. He died on September 23 while ambulances were prevented from reaching him.

We are fortunate to have the art and words of our Chilean comrades to sustain our obstinate memory. Here are the closing lines from Neruda's poem from 1935 entitled: *There Is No Forgetting: Sonata*

*see: the dying are legion,*

*legion, the breakwaters breached by the red of the sun,*

*the headpieces knocking the ship's side,*

*the hands closing over their kisses,*

*and legion the things I would give to oblivion.*

Gracias por el recuerdo; Gracias por la vida. Gracias.

*Theresa Wolfwood*