

Killer of Chilean folk singer Victor Jara to face US justice

Army lieutenant accused of killing popular singer in wake of 1973 military coup faces a civil suit in Florida court

April 16, 2015 12:23PM ET

by [Alfonso Serrano](#)

More than four decades after Chilean folk singer Victor Jara was tortured and executed in Santiago's Chile Stadium, in the wake of the military coup that brought [dictator Augusto Pinochet to power in 1973](#), an army lieutenant accused of killing the musician will face a civil lawsuit in the United States.

A U.S. district court in Florida agreed this week to hear the case against Pedro Barrientos Nuñez, the former lieutenant now residing in south Florida, who is alleged to have assassinated Jara, the poet and songwriter who became an iconic symbol of the struggle against Pinochet's regime and one of Latin America's most prominent protest singers.

The U.S.-based Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), which filed the lawsuit on behalf of Jara's wife and daughters, reacted with mixed emotions after the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida agreed to hear the case.

"We are delighted with the news that our case will move forward for torture and extrajudicial killing," Almudena Bernabeu, a CJA attorney, said in a statement. "It is nonetheless disappointing for our clients and all of us, that the court dismissed the crimes against humanity claim, because the killing of Víctor Jara — and thousands of crimes committed under the Pinochet regime — should be called what it is: a crime against humanity."

Jara was assassinated five days after the U.S.-backed Sept. 11, 1973, coup ousted democratically elected Salvador Allende from power. Jara, a member of

Chile's Communist Party, had served as Cultural Ambassador under Allende. He was also a professor and theater director at Santiago's State Technical University when it was overrun by military troops a day after the coup.

Jara, along with hundreds of other university teachers and students, was loaded onto a bus and transported to Chile Stadium (subsequently renamed Victor Jara Stadium) before he was recognized by military personnel and separated from other prisoners.

In 2009, former soldiers told a Chilean court that Jara was placed in Barrientos' custody. Soldiers under the lieutenant's command tortured Jara before Barrientos allegedly shot Jara to death. A Chilean appeals court in 2009 determined that Jara was killed on Sept. 16 as a result of 44 gunshot wounds.

That same year, Chilean prosecutors indicted Barrientos and seven other men for Jara's death. Barrientos, however, fled Chile in 1989 and currently resides in Deltona, Florida, and is beyond Chilean court reach. However, Chile's Supreme Court in 2012 approved an extradition request for Barrientos, and the former lieutenant could one day face a criminal trial in his native country.

More than 3,200 people were killed or disappeared by the Pinochet regime between 1973 and 1990, and more than 40,000 people survived imprisonment and torture. Amnesty International estimates that 260 people have been sentenced in Chile for human rights violations under Pinochet.

Although Jara was buried in Santiago's General Cemetery shortly after his death, his body was exhumed in 2009 so forensic analysts could clarify the circumstances of his death. Thousands of admirers witnessed his five-hour funeral procession through Santiago that December before his remains were reburied in the same cemetery.

An unidentified elderly woman, quoted by local press at the time, said, "V́ctor Jara finally rests in peace, but not his assassins."

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/16/killer-of-chilean-victor-jara-to-face-us-justice.html>