

Daily Mail

Ex-Pinochet Lieutenant Living Quietly in Florida Faces Civil Lawsuit from Family of Chilean Poet 'Brutally Tortured and Killed in Country's Military Coup 40 Years Ago'



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Hero of the people: Beloved Chilean folk singer Victor Jara was tortured and murdered by the Pinochet regime following the 1973 coup

By [Louise Boyle](#) PUBLISHED: 22:23 EST, 10 September 2013

A former Pinochet lieutenant has been served with a civil lawsuit by the family of a celebrated Chilean poet who they believe murdered him following the country's 1973 coup which took place 40 years ago on Wednesday.

Victor Jara's family have filed a civil lawsuit accusing former Chilean army Lt. Pedro Barrientos Nunez of ordering soldiers to torture Jara. The suit claims that Barrientos fired the fatal shot while playing a game of 'Russian roulette' inside a locker room in Santiago's Estadio Chile, where some 5,000 supporters of socialist President Salvador Allende were being detained.

The Jara family, led by Victor's widow Joan, filed the lawsuit last Wednesday in Jacksonville, Florida, in the hope that it will reinforce the case against Barrientos to have him extradited to Chile where he faces murder charges.

The family's legal team said that Barrientos was served notice when he opened the door at his home in Deltona, Florida, where he now lives as a U.S. citizen, a right obtained through marriage.

In September 1973, Mrs Jara was faced with the unthinkable task of identifying her husband's body after he had been rounded up at the university where he worked as a professor.

The body of Mr Jara, who worked as a university professor, had been riddled with bullets, his fingers and wrists broken, his stomach ripped out.

The poet's 86-year-old widow told the Daily Telegraph: 'It has been tough to keep fighting for 40 years but Victor's case is so important not just for us, but for all the families that are still suffering because of the brutality and the terrible crimes committed in those years.'



Never giving up: Joan Jara (left), widow of musician Victor Jara, Chilean actor Nelson Villagra and Victor's niece Amanda Jara. Joan Jara has fought for 40 years to bring his killers to justice

Barrientos, part of a group of officers who also face criminal charges in Chile related to the folk singer's killing, has denied all involvement, saying he wasn't there and didn't even know who Jara was at the time of the coup.

'I do not need to face justice because I have not killed anyone,' he told Chilevision TV in May 2012.

Last December, Barrientos and another officer were charged in Chile with murdering Jara, while five other former military officers were named as accomplices.

Most were detained, but Barrientos, who left Chile in 1989, has yet to face justice.

The criminal case has yet to be tried in Chile, but this civil suit claims that Barrientos led the 'criminal enterprise'.

It makes seven civil claims, including torture, extrajudicial killing and crimes against humanity.

The suit invokes two U.S. laws, the Torture Victim Protection Act and the Alien Tort Statute, that give U.S. courts standing to judge allegations of rights violations committed in other countries.

Victor Jara, whose songs tackled social and political issues, was swept up with thousands of other Allende supporters as Gen. Augusto Pinochet consolidated power in September 1973.

The lawsuit alleges that the folk singer was pulled from the crowd and was taken to a locker room inside the stadium where Barrientos ordered soldiers under his command to torture him.

According to the lawsuit: 'Lieutenant Barrientos put a pistol to the back of Victor Jara's head and proceeded to "play" rounds of 'Russian roulette.

'Lieutenant Barrientos loaded one bullet in the chamber of his pistol, spun the chamber and pulled the trigger, knowing that each shot could be lethal.'

Finally, Barrientos 'shot Victor Jara in the back of the head at point blank range,' and then 'ordered five military conscripts under his command to repeatedly shoot Victor Jara's corpse' at least 40 times before dumping the body outside, the lawsuit says.



History catching up: Pedro Barrientos Nunez, a former lieutenant of the Pinochet regime, has been served with a civil lawsuit over the poet's death
Pedro Barrientos Nunuz

CHILE'S DARK LEGACY: THE COUP D'ETAT WHICH SPIRALED INTO DECADES OF TORTURE AND TERROR

On September 11, 1973, a U.S.-backed junta bombed the presidential palace in Chile's capital Santiago to overthrow the socialist government of president Salvador Allende.

Allende refused to surrender and committed suicide in the palace after his armed forces turned against him.

In the months that followed the coup d'état, leader of the army, General Augusto Pinochet assumed power and brought a reign of terror down upon his people.

Many fled to live in exile while those who remained that were considered Allende sympathizers and left-leaning liberals were rounded up and detained.

Pinochet's dictatorship killed 3,095 people and made 1,000 or so others 'disappear' during the 17-years that it held power over Chile.

The government recently acknowledged 9,800 other victims, increasing the list of those killed, tortured or imprisoned for political reasons to 40,018.

To this day, the bodies of those who lost their lives to one of the darkest periods in Chilean history are still being found.

The suit doesn't identify any witnesses, but attorney Almudena Bernabeu with the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability, which is assisting the Jara family, told The Associated Press that Barrientos' responsibility was verified by two witnesses who corroborated information supplied by former conscript Jose Paredes, who himself was originally charged with Jara's murder.

The singer's widow Joan Jara and her daughters Amanda Jara Turner and Manuela Bunster, who were eight and 13 years old when Jara was killed, are seeking unspecified compensatory and punitive damages.

The Pinochet dictatorship killed 3,095 people and made 1,000 or so others 'disappear' during its 1973-90 rule, according to Chile's Truth and Justice Commission.

The government recently acknowledged 9,800 other victims, increasing the list of those killed, tortured or imprisoned for political reasons to 40,018.

About 700 military officials still face trial in Chile and about 70 have been jailed for crimes against humanity.

U.S. courts, too, have also taken action. Armando Fernandez Larios, another former Chilean army officer living in Florida, was ordered to pay \$4 million in damages in 2003 to the family of



Dark day: The bombing of La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago, Chile on September 11, 1973 during the U.S.-backed military coup

Chilean economist Winston Cabello, who was killed during the 'Caravan of Death' operation in October 1973.

That case was the first U.S. jury verdict involving crimes against humanity committed on foreign soil, Bernabeu said. The Cabello family has yet to collect any money.

'The fact that the man responsible for the torture and death of Victor Jara has been living freely in the United States shocks the conscience,' said the center's executive director, Pamela Merchant.

'Human rights abusers should not be able to enjoy safe haven here without consequence.'

Chile's Supreme Court has approved a judge's request to have Barrientos brought to Santiago to face criminal trial.

But that extradition request remains stuck in Chile's foreign ministry and has not been sent to the United States.