



Family Sues over Murder of Folk Singer by Pinochet Regime



By Benedict Mander in Buenos Aires, 9/5/2013

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A portrait of the murdered Chilean folk singer Víctor Jara at a memorial for him in Santiago in 2009

A lawsuit was filed in Florida on Thursday seeking damages against a former Chilean military officer accused of torturing and executing the folk singer

Victor Jara shortly after General Augusto Pinochet's 1973 military coup.

A win for Jara's family would represent a milestone for the victims of Pinochet's iron-fisted rule, which left about 3,000 people dead or "disappeared". Many of those accused of human rights abuses have still not been prosecuted on the eve of the coup's 40th anniversary next Wednesday.

"We are only one of many families still affected by the brutality of Pinochet's rule and the deplorable crimes committed," said Joan Jara, the widow of the songwriter and leftwing political activist. "We want to shine a light on the severe human rights abuses from this era and bring those responsible to justice."

Memories of the past remain vivid in Chile, as [presidential elections approach in November](#), in which Michelle Bachelet – a former president whose father was among more than 27,000 torture victims during the Pinochet regime – is expected to return to power on a ticket to reform the country's constitution, drafted during the Pinochet era.

"Even though 40 years have passed, there is still justice – it is still possible to go after those who have managed to evade the law for so long," said Baltasar Garzón, a Spanish judge who in 1998 attempted to extradite Pinochet to Spain to face justice for the alleged torture and killing of Spanish citizens.

Pedro Pablo Barrientos Nuñez, and seven other officers, were indicted in December by Chile's supreme court for the killing of Jara, and Mr Barrientos was recently found to be living in Deltona, Florida. A Chilean judge subsequently requested his extradition.

According to the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability, Mr Barrientos is one of a string of people recently found living in the US who are accused of committing human rights atrocities in countries including Somalia, Haiti, El Salvador, Peru and the former Yugoslavia.

“Human rights abusers should not be able to enjoy safe haven here without consequence,” said Pamela Merchant, executive director at the Center for Justice and Accountability.

Jara was imprisoned immediately after the coup, together with almost 1,000 students, professors and other civilians, in a Santiago sports stadium, where he was repeatedly tortured and then shot in the head, allegedly by Mr Barrientos, who is then accused of ordering soldiers to shoot the corpse dozens of times.

Other attempts to redress past wrongs in Chile include the exhumation two years ago of the remains of the president overthrown by Pinochet, Salvador Allende, amid allegations that he had been murdered. Forensic science tests revealed that he shot himself.

The remains of Pablo Neruda, the poet and Nobel laureate, were also exhumed this year to try to establish whether the communist intellectual was poisoned by the Pinochet dictatorship as he was about to flee into exile, days after Jara was killed.

On Thursday, Chile extradited an Argentine judge, Otilio Romano, who fled his country in 2011 seeking political asylum to avoid being tried for almost 100 alleged human rights crimes while working as a prosecutor during Argentina's 1976-83 military dictatorship.

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