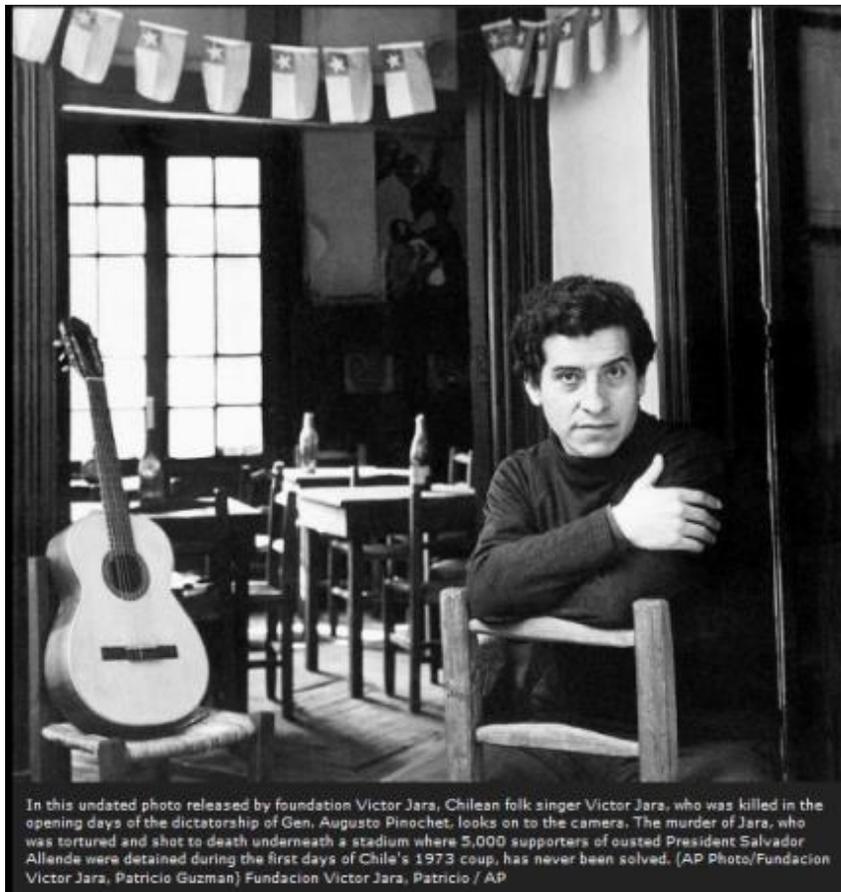


## Anniversary of Chilean Coup Brings Renewed Calls for Justice

By Mimi Whitefield Monday 9/9/2013



In this undated photo released by foundation Victor Jara, Chilean folk singer Victor Jara, who was killed in the opening days of the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, looks on to the camera. The murder of Jara, who was tortured and shot to death underneath a stadium where 5,000 supporters of ousted President Salvador Allende were detained during the first days of Chile's 1973 coup, has never been solved. (AP Photo/Fundacion Victor Jara, Patricio Guzman) Fundacion Victor Jara, Patricio / AP

The Chilean military officer put a pistol to folksinger Victor Jara's head in a game of Russian roulette, twirled the chamber and shot him point blank. Then he ordered a group of conscripts to fire into his corpse.

Now, four decades after Jara's death, a civil lawsuit has been filed in federal court in Jacksonville, claiming that Pedro Pablo Barrientos Nuñez — a man now living in Florida — is responsible for those events as well as the torture of Jara in the days after the democratically elected Marxist President Salvador Allende was toppled and a military dictatorship installed.

Chile marks the 40th anniversary of the bloody coup Wednesday and it is still struggling to come to terms with the legacy of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship that stretched from 1973 to 1990.

More than 3,000 people were killed by state agents or disappeared during that era, according to government estimates, and more than 27,000 were tortured. All told, the government now recognizes that more than 40,000 people were killed, imprisoned for political reasons or tortured.

Chile's Supreme Court President Ruben Ballesteros acknowledged Friday that the court was responsible for "serious actions and omissions" during the military dictatorship. And a few days earlier the Association of Magistrates issued a public apology for not doing enough to prevent abuses during the Pinochet years.

But through the years, Jara's widow, Joan, has kept up a steady drumbeat to find those responsible for the death of her husband — not only a singer but also a social icon, university professor, theater director and political activist. As with many victims of the dictatorship, justice has proven elusive.

For decades it wasn't even clear what went on behind the closed locker-room door at the stadium where Jara, a faculty member at State Technical University, was taken after he and nearly 1,000 students, professors and others were picked up on campus on Sept. 11, 1973.

It was the same day fighter jets flew over La Moneda, the presidential palace, and bombed the parliament — and Allende shot himself after recording a farewell radio address to the nation. At the time of the coup Chile had one of the longest-running, democratic traditions in the Americas.

Lawyers working on the case had complained that Chile's military was stonewalling, still denying it had information about which officers were assigned to the stadium. In late December 2012, eight retired army officers, including Barrientos, were indicted in Chile in connection with the murder and torture of Jara.

Barrientos was a lieutenant and a section commander in the Tejas Verdes regiment in 1973, according to the civil suit.

Barrientos, who has been living in a modest home in Deltona — a city of 85,000 residents midway between Daytona Beach and Orlando — and Hugo Sánchez, a lieutenant colonel who was second in command at the stadium and lives in Chile, were charged with committing the murder. The six other six officers were charged as accomplices.

But the civil suit filed Wednesday in Jacksonville goes a step further, alleging that Barrientos was the triggerman and the officer who instigated the torture of Jara.

"We believe Barrientos was the shooter," said Almudena Bernabeu, a lawyer with the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability, a human-rights organization. The center and the Chadbourne & Parke law firm filed the civil suit on behalf of Jara's widow, his daughter Amanda Jara Turner, and his step-daughter Manuela Bunster. Attempts to reach Barrientos were unsuccessful. One of his two listed phone numbers has been disconnected; another is out of service.

Last year, he denied any involvement and told Chilevisión TV: "I do not need to face justice because I have not killed anyone."

Barrientos, 64, was served notice of the civil suit Wednesday evening when he opened the door of his home, according to the Jara family legal team.

Now a U.S. citizen, he has been working in the auto parts business and has lived in the United States since 1989, said Bernabeu.

Property records show that he bought his two-bedroom fixer-upper in a distress sale for \$24,900 in April 2012. Previously he had lived in the communities of Winter Springs, Longwood and Altamonte Springs.

The civil complaint against Barrientos includes claims of torture, extrajudicial killing, crimes against humanity, arbitrary detention, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It seeks unspecified compensatory and punitive damages.

But Bernabeu said the case isn't as much about money as it is about justice for Jara and perhaps providing an impetus for the murder case in Chile.

"Victor's pursuit of democracy and human rights remains an inspiration to people around the world and his memory is ever present as we mark the 40th anniversary of the military coup and Victor's murder," said Joan Jara in a statement.

Jara was one of the most popular proponents of nueva canción, a movement that mixed traditional Latin American folk music with revolutionary themes. His song Venceremos (We shall overcome) was widely used at Allende rallies.

But to the military, Jara was a communist, a dangerous voice who was too close to Allende and needed to be silenced. According to the complaint, Jara was in the physical custody of Barrientos and the soldiers under his command when he was held at an underground locker room at the stadium.

For decades the sequence of events at the stadium was murky. Jara was hastily buried in secret after a civil servant, who recognized his body at the morgue, summoned his wife to identify him. Joan Jara, a British dancer, and her daughters then fled to her homeland. Now all are Chilean citizens.

Jara's body was exhumed in 2009 and that helped the investigation. It showed he had been shot in the head and later riddled with shots. There were at least 40 bullet wounds in his body.

But the investigation really advanced when conscripts, rather than just high-ranking military officers, were interviewed, said Bernabeu. "The conscripts don't have the same silence code or loyalty as the officers," she said. "What we didn't have before was information about who was directly involved."

The testimony of the conscripts helped build the case against Barrientos, she said. For the case to go forward in Chile, Barrientos would have to be extradited. Chile's Supreme Court has already signed off on extradition, but the foreign ministry needs to issue the request and that hasn't happened.

Bernabeu said with the Chilean presidential election approaching, the government may not be highly motivated to move on requesting extradition.

“What the civil suit also does is add a wider sense of justice that the family has been seeking for so long,” she said. Meanwhile, the 40th anniversary of the coup has prompted soul-searching and even self-recrimination in Chile, a country still divided over Pinochet and the past.

There are those who view Pinochet, who died in 2006, as the man who saved Chile from communism, from becoming the Cuba of the Southern Cone. But for others he remains a perpetrator of state terrorism and rampant disregard for human rights.

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera asked for help in healing the country last week and made a plea for anyone with information about those who “disappeared” during the Pinochet era to come forward.

“Truth is lacking,” he said, “when it comes to knowing the circumstances of how they died and the places where the people who are disappeared are buried.” Knowing, the president said, “will bring relief not only to their family members but to all of society.”

“One of the strongest impacts of the dictatorship, even more so than the killing of people and the disappearance of people, was how a whole society became more fearful,” said Javiera Parada, who remembers as a 11-year-old hearing a police helicopter from her classroom. It turned out to be the helicopter that took away her father, who had just dropped her off at school.

The next day her father, a teacher and another person were found near the airport with their throats slit, said the 39-year-old producer and artist.

“An entire society was living for 17 years with fear: fear of neighbor, fear about everyone,” she said. “What matters now is how we can start to dialogue with a country where never, never, never again will this type of thing happen.”

Ariel Nuñez Castaneda, 24, was just an infant when the military dictatorship ended, but he said his generation still feels very close to the subject of the coup. “I believe the coup is something that should not be forgotten,” said the graphic artist. “I really think that Chile may evolve into a better country. What I hope for is a fair and equitable Chile, in education, in the economy and in opportunities.”

Now Jara’s memory is kept alive at the stadium where he died. Today it is known as Estadio Víctor Jara and is used as a homeless shelter. On the wall is a plaque engraved with some of the last lines Jara ever wrote: “How hard it is to sing, when I must sing of horror. Horror in which I’m living, horror in which I’m dying.”

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