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Family of Chilean Singer Executed in 1973 Files Suit in Florida



By Kevin Gray MIAMI | Thu Sep 5, 2013 10:53pm BST

(Reuters) - The wife and two daughters of a popular folk singer who was tortured and executed in Chile days after a 1973 coup has filed a lawsuit in U.S. federal court against a former Chilean army officer - now an American citizen - they accuse of carrying out the killing.

The civil lawsuit, filed on Wednesday in Jacksonville, Florida, is an attempt by singer Victor Jara's family to bring former Chilean army lieutenant Pedro Barrientos to justice in the United States under two laws that allow U.S. courts to hear allegations of human rights violations committed in another country.

Prosecutors in Chile last year charged Barrientos and another officer with killing Jara and named six others as accomplices. Four former military officials were detained in connection with the case.

Jara was among thousands of political supporters of leftist President Salvador Allende rounded up by the military as Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet moved to tighten his grip on power after ousting Allende in the September 11, 1973, coup. His death became a symbol of human rights abuses under Pinochet.

Barrientos, who moved to the United States after Pinochet left power in 1990 and currently lives in Florida, has denied he played any role in Jara's killing. The Chilean Supreme Court has approved an extradition request for him but it has not been sent to U.S. authorities.

The lawsuit alleges that Barrientos tortured and executed Jara in a sports stadium 40 years ago.

The lawsuit over Jara, whose songs included "El Derecho de Vivir en Paz" ("The Right to Live in Peace"), comes as Chile grapples with the legacy of the coup just days before its 40th anniversary.

More than 3,000 people were kidnapped and killed during Pinochet's 1973-1990 rule. Another 28,000 people are believed to have been tortured during the military rule.

Barrientos was served with the complaint at his home in Deltona, Florida, on Wednesday night, according to the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability public interest law firm, which is assisting the Jara family.

In comments to Chilean television last year, Barrientos said he has no plans to return to Chile to face charges. "I am definitely not going back," he said.

According to witnesses, Jara was tortured for several days - his hands battered with the butt of a revolver - before he was shot dead. His bullet-riddled body was found dumped near a cemetery three days later.

The lawsuit claims Barrientos ordered soldiers under him to torture Jara, who had been taken to an underground locker room at a Santiago stadium being used a detention center.

After Jara was brutally beaten, Barrientos played several rounds of Russian roulette with a pistol pointed to the back of Jara's head, the lawsuit alleges.

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

Barrientos then shot Jara "in the back of the head at point blank range," it said. He told five military conscripts under his command to repeatedly shoot Jara's corpse, the lawsuit said.

(Additional reporting by Alexandra Ulmer in Buenos Aires; Editing by Will Dunham)

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/09/05/uk-usa-florida-chile-jara-idUKBRE98412R20130905>