

# Spain: Guardia Civil beat farm labourer to death

Vicky Short  
22 August 2005

In an August 10 letter to the Spanish authorities, Amnesty International (AI) has asked for “a full, thorough and independent investigation” into the events that led to the death of a farm labourer while in custody at the headquarters of the Civil Guard in Roquetas de Mar (Almeria).

Thirty-nine-year-old Juan Martinez Galeano was allegedly beaten to death by nine Civil Guards, led by Lieutenant José Manuel Rivas who was in charge of the barracks. A taser and an extensible baton were used to restrain him. AI stated in its letter, “The Spanish authorities must urgently suspend the use of all electro-shock weapons by law-enforcement agencies until the effects of the use of such weapons are fully known.”

Tasers are electro-shock stun weapons designed to cause instant incapacitation by delivering a high-voltage electro-shock. According to AI, more than 100 people in the US and Canada have died since 2001, after being electro-shocked with tasers. It adds that “most of those who died were unarmed men who, while displaying disturbed or combative behaviour, did not appear to present a serious threat to the lives or safety of others.”

On July 24, 2005, Martínez Galdeano went to the local headquarters of the Civil Guard to seek protection from people who were chasing him following a traffic incident he had been involved in. One and a half hours later he was dead.

According to official statements, when Galeano went into the Civil Guard HQ he was asked to undergo an alcohol test and became aggressive. He was then arrested for public disorder and for resisting law enforcement officials and had both his hands and his feet handcuffed, although no formal charge was ever issued.

The family’s lawyer, José Ramón Cantalejo, has said

the post-mortem carried out by the Legal Medicine Institute of Granada revealed that Galeano died as a consequence of the brutal beating he received. The lawyer added that the beating had been so severe that every single organ of his body was injured, from the head to the arms, the abdomen and the feet. About 40 blows were counted. Mr. Cantalejo said that “according to the pathologist, his sternum (breast bone) was broken from laying him on the floor, putting a foot on him and pulling him upwards.”

CCTV images at the police station show the victim in his underwear lying on the floor defending himself while the Lieutenant beat him with a taser and an extensible baton several times on the legs, arms and body. It also shows the victim then being dragged out of the view of the camera so that the full beating was not recorded.

Several complaints against the Lieutenant have been filed in the past, including one last February, when the father of Antonio San Martín denounced him for beating his son while in his custody.

The Director of the Civil Guard, Carlos Gómez Arruche, has come out in defence of Rivas, insisting that his record is impeccable. He also justified the use of the electric truncheon with the argument that it is normal to employ such weapons.

Tempers were raised against the Civil Guard and the government on the day of Galeano’s funeral. His widow, of Moroccan origin, had to be assisted after she fainted. The burial culminated with a series of demonstrations by mourners: first to the City Council where they held a five-minute silence, then to the doors of the Civil Guard’s barracks where they shouted “swines,” “criminals” and “assassins” at the agents, accusing them of treating Juan Martinez, who was “an innocent working man,” like a dog, and finally to the

courts where they demanded truth and justice so that those responsible for his death “will not be walking around free.”

Defence Minister Jose Bono, in a damage-limitation exercise, suspended eight of the nine officers involved in the beating for six months. The ninth is still a cadet and cannot be suspended. The reason given for the suspension was “abusing responsibility and carrying out inhumane, degrading, discriminatory or humiliating practices on people being held in police custody.” There was no mention of murder.

The Civil Guard is the infamous paramilitary police force, most hated among Spaniards for its brutal repressive role before and during the civil war and as the executioners at the command of General Franco in its aftermath. They were responsible for thousands of shootings carried out in the middle of the night by the roadsides and summary executions ordered by kangaroo courts. The mere sight of their three-corner shiny black hats instilled terror in the blood of people for decades.

Bono was a left-wing lawyer who defended many political prisoners of the Franco and Pinochet regimes. He built himself a reputation as a “left” during his 21 years as president of the autonomous regional government of Castilla-La Mancha until last year, when he was selected as defence minister in the new PSOE government.

Asked in an interview in El Pais on August 14 whether, with his history, did he not find it abhorrent that someone could go voluntarily into a police station and come out as a corpse, he said that he had a special aversion to torture and the abuse of force: “My public condemnation of these methods comes from a long time ago, from when denouncing torture could end you up in prison.”

The interviewer then asked him if torture still persisted in Spain. “Unfortunately,” Bono declared, “nobody can ensure the eradication of homicide and theft. We can only prevent them and punish them.... But the only form of torture that persists in Spain is that imposed by the terrorists on their victims.” He was, he added, behind the Civil Guard and its director without reservations of any kind. He added that there were people who did not want to understand what the Civil Guard represented today and were instead living in the past, such as in Casas Viejas (the southern Andalusian

village where 22 peasants were massacred in 1933). Today, Bono said, the Civil Guard represented exactly what their motto says: “Spain, law and order.”

Ever since the demise of the Franco regime and the transformation of Spain into a parliamentary democracy there have been demands for the Civil Guard to be demilitarised. The election manifesto of the PSOE promised to carry this out when in government. It has remained a pledge even though it was in power for 14 years from 1982 to 1996.

Asked whether, following the killing of Galeano, the renewed demands for the de-militarisation of the Civil Guard would now be taken up, Bono said, “The government is not going to give in on this. I am in favour of its [the Civil Guard’s] military status for the same reasons that other forces of a similar nature are maintained in Holland, France, Italy and Portugal. At present, the Civil Guard is deployed in 2,000 posts. It is a way to diversify and enhance the state presence in the entire national territory.... For a Civil Guard, ‘Everything for the Fatherland’ is more than a slogan on the door of their HQ.... [T]he military nature of the Civil Guard is decisive to guarantee the security of Spaniards.”

The millions of Spaniards who have been victims of the notorious Civil Guard over the decades would strongly disagree with Mr. Bono and his assurances that their security depends on this brutal and corrupt institution. He is, however, not thinking of those Spaniards, but his concerns are to strengthen the repressive state forces in order to safeguard the rich and their corporate businesses while maintaining the existing social inequality.

To this end, and in the middle of a general wage restraint, Mr. Bono declared that he is about to increase the salaries of the Civil Guards. “It is going to be a historic increase, over 15 percent, which the military forces have deserved for many years. I have been fighting for this increase ever since I became minister and in fact I have the support of the prime minister.”



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**