



Iñaki de Juana Chaos, a member of Eta, the Basque separatist group, lies emaciated and shackled and could die at any time. He says he will only abandon his protest for unconditional freedom

Shackled and emaciated, Eta killer pleads for peace from his deathbed

► **Hunger strike reaches 91st day**

► **200,000 victims go on protest march**

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Madrid

A convicted key member of Eta, the Basque separatist group, who is close to death after three months without eating, has called on the Spanish Government to resume talks to reach a peace deal.

In his first interview since embarking on a hunger strike 91 days ago, Iñaki de Juana Chaos said that he strongly backed the peace process, which stalled after Eta detonated a huge bomb at Barajas airport, Madrid, on December 30. The blast destroyed a multi-storey car park, killed two people and shattered a nine-month ceasefire that the group had described as permanent.

Now the emaciated prisoner, a renowned hardliner viewed as a key figure in the peace process, has urged a fresh effort to solve the conflict. Even as he did so, 200,000 supporters of Eta victims marched in Madrid at the weekend, calling on José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the

Prime Minister, to resign for having entered into talks with Eta during its ceasefire.

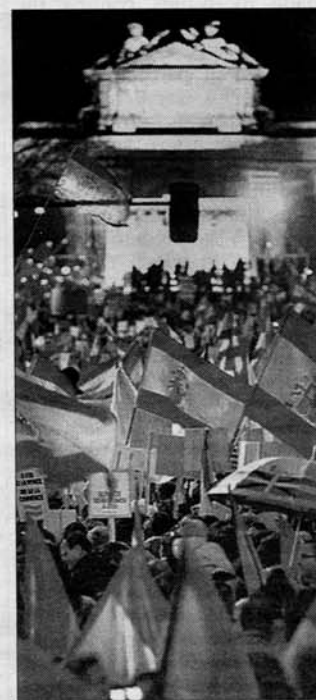
"I am completely in agreement with the democratic process of dialogue and negotiation ... to resolve the political conflict between the Basque region and the French and Spanish states," de Juana told *The Times* from his secure hospital room in Madrid, where he is being force-fed by authorities. "After the event at Barajas ... resolution of the conflict is more necessary than ever," he said in written answers.

For the Spanish Government, de Juana's protest over his continued detention, two years after completing his sentence, is a growing political nightmare. With doctors cautioning that de Juana could die in days or weeks, Mr Zapatero's Government is braced for what could be its deepest crisis since it took power in 2004.

The case, which recalls Bobby Sands's fatal IRA hunger strike in 1981, has faced the Spanish socialist Government with a dilemma. If he dies, de Juana will become a martyr to the Basque independence movement. Some fear that Eta could use his death to justify a renewed bombing campaign, and there are reports that the group has already been eyeing

tourist spots for future attacks. But if the Government allows him to serve out a reduced sentence at home, as some judges advocate, it will provoke an outcry on the Right, only three months away from important

local elections. Even if he were allowed home, it is far from certain that de Juana would survive. He said in his interview that he would not abandon his protest for anything short of unconditional freedom.



Eta victims on a huge protest march in Madrid on Saturday

De Juana Chaos

Age 51
Height 5ft 8in (173cm)
Normal weight 14st 8lb (80kg)
Current weight 8st 3lb
Hunger strike 91 days
Previous strike 63 days
Arrested 1987
Convicted of 25 deaths
Sentenced to 3,000 years in prison, but was to serve only 18 years. Completed officially in October 2004
New sentence (November 2006) 12 years, 7 months, for publishing two opinion articles in a newspaper
Also known for trying to orchestrate a James Bond-style escape from a top-security prison using a helicopter. Said to have ordered prawns and champagne from his jailers to celebrate the killing of a politician and his wife

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"I would not have abandoned the hunger strike in exchange for a reduced sentence. The only acceptable alternative is complete liberty and an end to the brutal attacks on freedom of expression that this legal process implies," he said.

De Juana was sentenced in 1987 to 3,000 years in jail for his part in 25 deaths, including machinegunning a car containing three soldiers, murdering a rear-admiral and planting a car bomb that killed 12 military policemen. Under sentencing guidelines then in force he had to serve only 18 years and was due to be freed in 2004. The Government, fearing a public outcry, unearthed two opinion articles that he had published in a Basque newspaper and charged him with making terrorist threats. Juan Fernando López Aguilar, the Justice Minister, promised to do "whatever is in our power to prevent these releases", adding that the Government was working to "construct new charges" against Eta prisoners "like we did with de Juana Chaos".

De Juana began a hunger strike last year but dropped it after 63 days when it looked as though the Government would seek a much-reduced sentence. Then a court gave him another 12 years and 7 months in jail,

prompting him to restart his hunger strike. Legal experts have questioned the ruling. On Saturday the Association of European Democratic Lawyers said that the sentence was "an exceptional resolution of extraordinary harshness".

Some fear that de Juana's death could persuade others who remain in jail after their sentences have ended to follow suit, giving the 40-year conflict a new lease of life. Nine republican prisoners followed Bobby Sands in 1981; their deaths triggered a surge in IRA activity, fundraising and recruitment.

Despite his deteriorating condition, de Juana is in uncompromising mood. He expressed no remorse for his killings and said that he felt no responsibility for the tumult that his death could cause. "Can you blame the repressed for the actions of the repressor? Can you blame the violated for the actions of the violator?" he asked, rhetorically.

His mother died a week ago and doctors say that he could experience "sudden death" any day. "Not being able to live a normal life is very hard. Only those of us who have experienced it can understand it," he said. "So that it is not repeated, the roots of the conflict must be addressed."