

IN SUPPORT OF THE NEWSPAPER EGUNKARIA AND THE PEOPLE ACCUSED

It should never have happened, but in February 2003 the Spanish National Criminal Court (*Audiencia Nacional*) closed down **Egunkaria**, the only daily published in the Basque language, and proceeded to arrest several of its executives, on the basis of a report drawn up by the Spanish Police (*Guardia Civil*). Several of the detainees complained that they had been tortured while they were on police premises.

Despite the fact that the Public Prosecutor requested that the case be permanently dropped in view of the lack of consistency in the accusations brought, the Spanish National Criminal Court has taken the accusation filed by the *Terrorism Victims Association (AVT)* and *Dignidad y Justicia* organisations into consideration, and has ruled that the trial will be held; this is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.

We consider that the closing down of the newspaper **Egunkaria** and the prosecuting of some of its executives should be repudiated for the following reasons:

- It constitutes a denial of freedom of expression and an assault on the pluralism of information which any State that regards itself as democratic must respect and defend.
- It is an out-and-out attack on the Basque language and the Basque culture as a whole, as well as on the right of Basque men and women to develop their own media.
- The torture endured by some of the prosecuted is totally inadmissible and is added to the long succession of complaints of ill treatment in the Spanish State, which has even been echoed by the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Torture, Theo Van Boven.

This is why we are calling for these things to be denounced, and are urging the public at large to show their solidarity with the people facing trial; and to defend the democratic rights which have been seriously infringed through this and other proceedings; the curtailment of these rights affects each and every one of us.

We invite any groups or individuals who are interested to support and spread this manifesto, and actively participate in the campaigns and actions that will be taking place to denounce the curtailment of freedoms that this case represents, and to express solidarity with the people accused.

*Did you know
that the authorities
in the Spanish State closed
down newspapers?*

**That is the case of the
newspaper Egunkaria**



1.- The **Egunkaria** daily was founded in 1990, and until that moment had been the only newspaper published exclusively in the Basque language. There had been an ephemeral, courageous experience during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) with the newspaper EGUNA, which in those difficult circumstances kept going until Bilbao was taken by the Franco side in July 1937.

2.- Values like independence, pluralism, progressiveness, the Basque national perspective, and the promoting of the Basque language were prominent in **Egunkaria's** editorial line.

3.- The publishing company was set up in 1990 with contributions of about 1,500 stakeholders.

4.- In February 2003 the Spanish National Criminal Court (*Audiencia Nacional*) proceeded to have the newspaper closed down and 10 people arrested (nine executives and another person in no way connected with the paper's setup): five of these people complained that they had been subjected to torture during the days they were being held incommunicado in the hands of the Spanish Police (*Guardia Civil*). Between them, they were remanded in custody for a period totalling 30 months.

5.- They have been accused of belonging to ETA, which is baseless and not supported by any evidence whatsoever.

6.- The Public Prosecutor has called for the case to be dropped once and for all owing to a lack of evidence. Despite this, and without any prosecution having been brought by any individuals or organisations affected, the Spanish National Criminal Court has decided that the trial will be held, basing itself exclusively on the prosecution brought by the organisations Terrorism Victims Association (AVT) and Dignidad y Justicia, who are seeking prison sentences of between 12 and 14 years for the 5 **Egunkaria** executives.

7.- The trial is due to be held in Madrid in the coming weeks and could well be kept under wraps by the authorities and some of the media.

8.- On the very day of the closing down the staff started publishing a newspaper in Basque called "Egunero", and four months later the **Berria** daily made its appearance with the support of 24,040 stakeholders. It took over from **Egunkaria** with respect to the defence of Basque values and culture.

9.- Since the closing down, the Basque Country has witnessed many acts of solidarity as have many places within the Spanish State, in particular, Catalonia, Madrid, Galicia, Valencian Country, and the Canary Islands. Internationally, the media response to the closing down of **Egunkaria** may have been even greater than in any other Basque case.

10.- What we are facing is a serious curb on freedom of expression, on pluralism of information, and on the right to develop the Basque language and culture, in addition to an assault on human rights as a result of the torture endured.

This fight affects each and every one of us:
please support it

FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT:
www.egunkaria.info/international

Egunkaria libre!