



Powered by Clickability

Spain arrests ETA-linked lawmaker

- Spanish police arrest leading ETA-linked Basque politician
- Arnaldo Otegi was charged under terror laws for inciting violence
- He was sentenced to 15 months in jail but has been free on bail since last year
- ETA announced Tuesday that it would resume attacks "on all fronts"

From CNN Madrid Bureau Chief Al Goodman

MADRID, Spain (CNN) -- Police arrested a leading politician linked to the Basque separatist group ETA on Friday, shortly after the Spanish Supreme Court upheld his 15-month sentence for praising terrorism, CNN partner station CNN+ reported.

The politician, Arnaldo Otegi, is a leader of the outlawed party Batasuna, widely considered to be ETA's political wing.

His arrest comes three days after ETA announced the end of its 15-month unilateral cease-fire that had raised hopes for an end to 40 years of separatist violence in which ETA is blamed for more than 800 deaths.

Police arrested Otegi in the northern Basque city of San Sebastian, shortly after the Supreme Court, in Madrid, upheld a lower-court's conviction of him last year for glorifying terrorism at a memorial in December 2003 for a dead ETA leader.

Otegi was sentenced to 15 months in jail but has been free on \$300,000 bail since last year on terrorism charges of inciting violence.

During the cease-fire, Otegi was a self-proclaimed key interlocutor in potential peace talks, although the government says ETA's aim of Basque independence was never considered a viable option.

But if the government and courts appeared to take a soft-glove approach toward Otegi during the cease-fire, the mood quickly shifted following ETA's announcement in a statement Tuesday that it was ready to resume attacks "on all fronts."

On Thursday, police made the first arrests since the end of the cease-fire, of three ETA suspects in southern France, ETA's traditional rearguard, across the border from Spain.

On Wednesday, the government ordered a notorious convicted ETA killer, Jose Ignacio de Juana Chaos to return to prison after a medical condition prompted a hospital stay. He had been serving a separate sentence for making terrorist threats.

De Juana Chaos, who already served his sentence for 25 ETA murders, went on a hunger strike in prison after a court convicted him on separate charges of making terrorist threats in newspaper articles. The government sent him to hospital when his health seriously deteriorated, prompting criticism of undue leniency from Spain's conservative opposition Popular Party.

At hospital, De Juana Chaos began recuperating when he started eating again. Back in prison since Wednesday, Spanish media reported that he has resumed his hunger strike.

The Spanish government considered ETA's cease-fire was broken as of last December 30, when an ETA car bomb killed two people at Madrid's airport, severely damaging the newest terminal and a parking garage.

ETA is considered a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union.