

PROXY OBSERVER

INFORMAMOS A LA COMUNIDAD INTERNACIONAL

Spot Report: Dignity Marches, Police Ambush, Beatings and Torture in Madrid

Prepared for:

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INTRODUCTION:

This report outlines some of the most relevant background details and occurrences during an event celebrated in Madrid, known as *Las Marchas de la Dignidad* (Dignity Marches). The report contains information pertaining to both the preparation of the event by the organisers and the aftermath to the event.

The report also contains photographic and video evidence to support our claim that Spanish police were involved in brutal beatings of participants, as well as isolated cases of torture, with intent to cause pain and suffering to innocent bystanders. We will make recommendations to the OSCE / ODIHR at the end of the report.

LOCATION & DATE OF PROTEST

For the past two years, this event has been celebrated in Madrid, on or near March 22. This year the event fell on a Saturday (March 21) and as usual, the main location for the event was a central plaza known as **Plaza de Colón**, where the **stage** was set up for the arrival of the different columns from throughout Spain.

BACKGROUND TO THE EVENT:

The OSCE / ODIHR is already familiar with the *Marchas de la Dignidad* (Dignity Marches) having observed the event last year, and subsequently published a **report** on some of the more controversial aspects of police action.

In 2014, one and a half million people attended the marches for the first time, amid warnings and threats from the delegation in Madrid, that violent left-wing elements had infiltrated the marches.

Those predictions turned out to be completely false, as those who caused the riots were well-known *Falange* radicals who took advantage of a weak and disorganised UIP police force, to cause havoc and chaos.

This year too, the warnings were there. We ourselves sent this [article](#) to the *Interior Ministry* and Spanish police before the marches, to ensure that there were no violent incidents.

The article in question, contains photographs, names, details of all those individuals involved in the violence of last year's event. It is clear proof that those responsible for attacking the police are *Falange* movement members, whose faces are well known to police.

EVENT ORGANISERS:

The organisers of the *Dignity Marches*, are a collective of more than **200** social groups operating under the name [@Marchas22M](#). Among those participating in the planning and preparation of the event, are respected figures from workers unions and social movements. Some of the smaller political groups, were also involved in the promotion of the event on social media and regular media outlets.

It has to be said from the outset, that the organisers of *Las Marchas* abided by the rules imposed on them by the delegation in Madrid to the letter. A security cordon, made up of more than 50 people was organised for the day, just as the authorities had requested.

Meetings were held with the police, in some cases under duress, to establish limits on the organiser's freedom to manage their own event. Direct contact between police and organisers during the event was agreed and established, and the authorities were notified in advance that the event would take place.

COLUMNS AND ROUTES:

The *Dignity Marches* are unique among social protests, in that participants travel from all four corners of Spain to participate. As the day of the main event in Madrid neared, a total of **nine columns** approached the capital from the North, South, East and West. Participants travelled on foot, by bus and train, often through spectacular **scenery** just to be in Madrid on March 21.

Proxy Observer has **photographic evidence** to prove that Spanish paramilitary forces known as *Guardia Civil*, stopped and searched coaches on the route to Madrid, apparently checking the identity of passengers.

Several coaches were stopped, people were ordered to get off and exhaustive searches were carried out on luggage. This type of low level harassment is common in Spain in the run up to political events, strikes and rallies, and is very much politically motivated.

THE MARCH TO COLON:

The final stage before arriving at the central plaza in Madrid known as *Plaza de Colón*, where the main event was to be held, was the march from several points in Madrid. The *Proxies* joined column 7 from *Puerta del Sol* to *Plaza de Colón*. The agreed time was 4pm. The meeting point, *Puerta del Sol*.

Several social groups joined **Column 7** in *Sol*, including: *Coordinadora25S*, PCE (Spanish communists), *Plataforma contra la Impunidad Franquista*, *Yayoflautas* and one or two collectives from Valencia.

As we were beginning to gather, the names of several lawyers were read out. These would provide legal representation to those arrested and taken to police stations. As it was, their services were critical in ensuring protestors' legal rights were respected.

A political manifesto was read out with the central theme of the *Dignity Marches*: *Pan, Techo, Trabajo y Dignidad* (Bread, Housing, Work and Dignity). A reference to Spain's austerity measures which have left millions of Spaniards struggling to pay for basic needs as a result of losing their jobs. As with 2014, human dignity in the face of savage government cutbacks, was at the heart of *Las Marchas*.

An hour later, and after an unexplained change of route, we were off towards a traffic roundabout known as *Cibeles*, watched over by our friendly security cordon, and led by an ambulance, not police vans as usual.

Other **flag waving** groups joined us in *Cibeles*, including more PCE members and *Izquierda Unida*, a left-wing parliamentary group. Then, after a brief pause, we continued on our way towards *Plaza de Colón*.

POLICE PRESENCE:

On the route towards the main stage in *Plaza de Colón*, police numbers were surprisingly low. There were no police vehicles ahead of us on the route (only an ambulance) but several police vans were present at the meeting point in *Puerta del Sol*.

It wasn't until we had almost reached *Plaza de Colón*, that we began to see some local police. This modest police presence gradually increased as the event unfolded, with massive numbers of **riot police** and **police vans** visible towards the end of the event.

THE MAIN EVENT IN COLON:

Even as we approached *Plaza Colón*, where a huge stage had been set up, we began to hear the music in the distance. As we entered the **crowded** plaza, we saw banners and flags originating from every corner of the Spanish state.

There were flags on broom sticks, mop handles and even fishing rods. There were foreign flags from: Cuba, Bolivia, the ex-Soviet Union, Venezuela, Greece and even the newly-declared Republic of Donetsk.

At this stage of the event, the atmosphere in *Plaza de Colón* was relaxed. There were some police vans parked along the side of the road, but access to the plaza via several routes was still possible.

On stage, the organisers welcomed those arriving in many of the Iberian peninsula's official languages, including: Catalan, Basque, Galician, Valencian and of course Castilian (*Castellano*); the language most Europeans recognise as "Spanish".

THE MANIFESTO (GENERAL STRIKE):

On October 22, Spanish workers are going on a **general strike**. That was the opening message from the *Dignity March* organisers. The reasons for such a strike were enumerated eloquently on stage by speaker after speaker, who demanded a dignified life for Spanish people.

As a result of the government's austerity measures, Spaniards now find themselves struggling to make ends meet with a combination of low salaries, high prices and high unemployment.

Every conceivable social issue was touched upon in the various manifestos, from unemployment (currently five million) to poverty levels (now running at 20%). Especially hard-hit are the three million people with no income or benefit entitlement. Corruption is currently eating up 5% of GDP, and Spain's infamous gag laws (*Ley Mordaza*) threaten to silence social movements.

Other manifesto topics included: the national debt, which has doubled since the current hard-line government of Mariano Rajoy came to power in 2010. A government which appears completely out of touch with Spanish voters on everything from: essential services like electricity, health, education, to evictions, regional autonomy and women's rights.

Since article 135 of the Spanish constitution was hurriedly changed by decree to instantly transform the banker's own private debt into a public debt, poverty levels among middle-class families with children have rocketed. As priority is given to the payment of an illegitimate debt, essential services are savagely reduced.

Those unable to meet their mortgage demands, find themselves evicted from their homes by heavily armed riot police acting on the orders of a government which serves only the interests of bankers, forcing ordinary people into a desperate situation.

INCREASE IN TENSION:

An hour into the event, it became apparent to us that tensions were rising due to a dramatic increase in police vans. At 7pm people began to leave the area in significant numbers, as UIP police continued to block access to some roads with metal barriers. We observed how our security cordon stood on one side of the barrier and the police on the other in a tense stand off.

As the manifestos began to conclude, we learnt that a tent hospital had been set up nearby, possibly an indicator that violence would be used to break up the event. Dozens of police vans began to encircle the plaza closing access to roads. We counted a total of 160 riot vans dispersed in groups of between 30 - 60 vans.

At 7pm the first of several loud bangs was heard, possibly from a banger intentionally set off by someone in the crowd, though according to another *Proxy* who was present at the event, there was an earlier bang.

Within an hour, at 8pm, the event had almost concluded, in an atmosphere of high tension. UIP police stood with their faces covered in the adjoining streets, many with their helmets on. Most of those who had been directly in front of the stage, including parents with children, left quickly once the event had ended.

A final shaky song from the chorus group *Solfónica*, and eight police vans quickly moved into the centre of the plaza, parking directly in front of the stage.

POLICE BRUTALITY AND TORTURE:

As the stage was being dismantled, we were relieved and satisfied that the event had apparently concluded without violent incidents. Unfortunately, as we set off towards the centre of Madrid, we soon discovered that elsewhere the aftermath to the event had been very violent indeed, with a police ambush, indiscriminate beatings and even blatant cases of torture.

The reported incidents in the centre of Madrid, began before the end of *Las Marchas*, as a group of some 200 people made their way home. According to some **reports**, this group cut off road traffic, provoking an immediate and totally unnecessary baton charge from Spanish police.

This action sent people scuttling in all direction in penny packet groups, towards the surrounding back streets where they were eventually ambushed and severely beaten by police (**video 1:45**).

The use of indiscriminate police violence, and attempts by police to block **photographers** from recording their actions was widespread. Equally worrying are reports that secret police punched people knocking them out cold before handing them over to police.

Video evidence of these claims can be seen here ([video 0:03](#)). The video shows a young man being punched and knocked unconscious by Spanish secret police who then drag him away.

Other even more alarming eye witness reports of police torture come from Twitter, including these **tweets** from someone who was detained by Spanish police for two hours.

In these tweets the victim of police torture claims that he was forced to kneel on the hard ground for several hours, causing him tremendous pain. Others were gratuitously insulted by UIP police agents, including a woman who was called a "fat bitch" and forced to kneel while her ID was checked.

While we did not witness any of these cases of police abuse ourselves, we are convinced that they are credible, particularly as the video and photographic evidence is so strong.

The OSCE / ODIHR should note that as of July 1, the recording of Spanish police while on duty is now illegal in Spain under the new *Citizen Security law (Ley Mordaza)*, but without this photographic and video evidence it is impossible to prove police wrongdoing.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA:

There appears to exist a direct correlation between the timing of violent police operations against protestors, and Spanish TV news broadcasts. On the day of the *Dignity Marches*, *Anonymous España* tweeted some **information** to back up this claim.

Anonymous contrasted the timing of police action and the breakdown of law and order at several recent protests, with the times TV news programmes, known as *TeleDiarrios*, were scheduled to start.

The dramatic results of this comparison speak for themselves. In all cases of violence at protests, including: **#25S** (25 September), **#23F** (23 February) and **#22M** (22 March), there is a clear link between the start of the police operation and the scheduled transmission time of the news programmes.

All the major TV channels, including: TVE (*Televisión Española*), A3 (*Antena 3*), T5 (*TeleCinco*), and TM (*TeleMadrid*), began transmitting LIVE images of public disturbances at 21:00, half an hour after an initial police baton charge and at the height of the violent disturbances.

The timing of police action at the *Dignity Marches* also fits perfectly with this theory, and appears to be yet another attempt by the media in collaboration with the authorities, to discredit the organisers of the event.

This crude manipulation of Spain's mass media and security forces for propaganda purposes, has but one objective to associate peaceful social movements with acts of vandalism and criminality in the eyes of the public.

ARRESTS AND INJURIES:

There were a total of 17 arrests in the aftermath of the *Dignity Marches*, though no arrests were made at the event itself in Plaza de Colón. Video evidence on *Youtube* of brutal police assaults against members of the public, suggest quite a few physical injuries were inflicted, with more than one person needing hospital treatment.

Other press reports indicate that senior citizens were also beaten by police away from the main area of the conflict in the centre of Madrid. A **76 year old pensioner** belonging to a group of older political activists, known as *Yayoflautas*, is confirmed as having been assaulted by Spanish police after attending the event.

It is not the first time Spanish authorities have targeted this group of senior citizens, many of whom suffered political persecution under Franco's dictatorship. In our opinion, these latest aggressions are a continuation of the Franco era harassment.

THE AUTHORITIES:

All the evidence we have gathered points to a possible attempt by the government delegation in Madrid, to discredit this year's *Dignity Marches* for ideological and propaganda reasons.

The video and photographic evidence of the violent aftermath to the event hints strongly at a pre-planned police ambush, in which Spanish **police knew** in advance what would happen and were given free reign to brutally attack people in small back streets, using police vans to **obscure** camera vision.

The whole incident appears to suggest a well-coordinated revenge operation, in which vengeful delegation chief, Cristina Cifuentes, controlled media outlets, and Spain's UIP (riot police) conspired together to ruin an otherwise successful political event.

An event which brought together thousands of people from throughout Spain, to demand an end to government austerity measures and to call for a well overdue general strike on October 22.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS:

Our conclusion is that the goodwill and cooperative attitude shown towards the authorities by *Las Marchas* organisers is beyond question. This year's Dignity Marches were better planned, with even stronger emphasis on public safety.

Proof of the higher level of security is the fact that no incidents were reported during the event itself. However, the same cannot be said of the attitude of the authorities or the forces of law and order.

The levels of gratuitous police violence seen in Madrid on March 21, are unacceptable and should be investigated fully by the international community. Spanish UIP police seized on the opportunity to beat up a group of 200 protestors, using excessive force, when it was clearly not necessary to contain the situation.

Their motivation in using such violence becomes evident from the **comments** made by UIP police to those people who were held or detained. "*We want to stop your urge to protest*" said one Spanish policeman. A clear case of force being used to stop a democratic right.

As independent observers of this event, we have no doubt that the ultimate intention of those who conspired to disrupt this peaceful event, was to steal the headlines and present a distorted view of *Las Marchas* for the second year running.

The suggestion that **infiltrators** and secret police were used to provoke trouble and violence towards the end of the event, is backed by strong photographic and video evidence which must be correctly analysed.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid whether it now accepts that video monitoring of the UIP provides essential proof of police wrongdoing, and that criminalising such activities only encourages impunity and abuse of power.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to unite with other international organisations in condemning the Spanish government in the strongest possible terms for the incidents of police torture in Madrid against innocent citizens.

We suggest the OSCE / ODIHR invites Madrid to publicly accept that they were wrong in their assertion that left-wing groups caused last year's troubles at the Dignity Marches, which were in fact disrupted by the government-backed *Spanish Falange* movement.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR confirm with the delegation in Madrid whether it took press warnings of potential violence at the marches by right-wing elements seriously.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether it agrees that the delegation's attempt to criminalise peaceful political events, is undermining the institutions and damaging the reputation of the forces of law and order.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to comment on all the hard work and preparation that went into organising the Dignity Marches, and whether they agree that the organisers did an excellent job in ensuring public safety.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to contact Madrid for an explanation with regard to the hijacking of coaches by paramilitary Guardia Civil in the run up to the event.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR clarify with Madrid whether the political content of the manifestos, in any way influenced the violent reaction of Spanish police on March 21.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid whether they agree that all human beings regardless of income have the same right to food, housing, work and dignity, or whether that is only an exclusive right of the rich.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether Spanish police continue to see themselves as the nation's protectors from communism, as in Franco's time.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR ask Madrid to explain the sudden dramatic increase in police numbers towards the end of the March 21 event.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Madrid to comment on the plans by Spanish workers to hold a general strike on October 22.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR ask Madrid for a written response to each of the political points made by speakers on stage during the dignity Marches.

We invite the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether it plans to discipline those UIP police officers responsible for indiscriminately attacking members of the public on March 21.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid whether it now accepts responsibility for the social misery caused by their antisocial austerity measures.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether the recent changes to article 135 of the constitution will be reversed, and the debt returned to the banks for them to pay.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR seek an explanation from Madrid with regard to the sudden decision to block roads and increase tension towards the end of the event in Plaza de Colón.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether the presence of an emergency tent hospital in the *Plaza de Colón* area, is proof that Spanish police had orders to violently break up this political event.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Madrid to explain why the area around the main stage was surrounded by police vans with flashing lights, even before the event had ended.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR ask Madrid to comment on the presence of 160 police vans in *Plaza de Colón*, and whether it considers this level of security was necessary.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Madrid to explain why UIP police put on their riot helmets and covered their faces towards the end of the event when there was clearly no threat to their safety.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether the police ambush of people who were leaving the March 21 event, was pre-planned or in any way a police set up.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Madrid to condemn the tactic of forced kneeling for several hours as used by Spanish police, and whether they consider this painful technique to be legalised torture.

We invite the OSCE / ODIHR to question Madrid on the theory that peaceful protests in Spain are violently crushed by police, in time for the LIVE news on TV.

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with the delegation in Madrid whether the violent incidents registered after the *Dignity Marches*, were a deliberate attempt to discredit this event.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to confirm with Madrid the reason behind the arrest of a 76-year-old Spanish Yayoflauta pensioner, and whether it forms part of a political campaign by the state to hunt down retired Republicans.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR clarify with Madrid whether delegation chiefs gave UIP police the order to use police vans to block the vision of photographers and journalists as people were being beaten by *antidisturbios* (riot police).

We ask the OSCE / ODIHR to invite Madrid to comment on the widespread belief that the incidents in central Madrid, were an attempt by police to settle the score for last year's rout.

We urge the OSCE / ODIHR to send the photographic and video evidence contained in this spot report, to higher international institutions for careful examination.

We recommend the OSCE / ODIHR invite Madrid to comment on the assertion that the level of police violence on March 21, was excessive and counter productive.

Finally, we ask the OSCE / ODIHR to clarify with Madrid whether the aim of the police operation on March 21, was to, quote: "*stop people's urge to protest*", as Spanish police themselves later claimed.

Report date: 2 April, 2015

RELEVANT VIDEOS & PHOTOGRAPHS:

VIDEO evidence of police harassment at *Las Marchas*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aURMhMr8FkA>

LIVE VIDEO feed from Plaza de Colón:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaSSTGeWH9I#t=7988>

Press article about event:

<http://goo.gl/MXcqwS>

Details of all the cities where this protest took place:

<http://goo.gl/Jq1PZS>

Poster of event:

<http://goo.gl/ivu2WO>

Photographs and background information on this protest:

<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/marchasdignidad.html>

For more reports on past and future protests:

<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/informes.html>