

BASQUE COUNTRY DAY

GUZTION EGUNA



The Lehendakari addressing his audience

Mexico, the businessman Jose María Aldekoa, the journalist Iñaki Gabilondo, the mountaineer Edurne Pasaban and the politician Juan María Bandrés were presented with the highest awards in the Basque Country, during a ceremony held on October 25 at the Lehendakaritza on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Statutes of Gernika.

On October 25, the Basque Government commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Statutes of Gernika at a solemn ceremony held at the Lehendakaritza, attended by hundreds of political, cultural and social representatives of the Basque Country. The event sought to pay tribute to the document that established the Basque Country as a political community in 1979, providing it with a level of self-government never experienced until then.

Mexico received the Lagun Onari award for providing a haven for thousands of Basques during the Civil War

The Basque Government used the occasion to present the Basque Country's highest accolades, the Lagun Onari and Lan Onari awards. The Laguna Onari award was presented to the United States of Mexico, and the Lan Onari awards were given to the president of the Corporación Mondragón, Jose María Aldekoa, who the Lehendakari praised for his determination in "consolidating and developing this world model of cooperativism", the journalist Iñaki Gabilondo, the mountaineer Edurne Pasaban and the politician Juan María Bandrés, who was not able to attend due to ill health. The award was collected by his friend Alberto Aguirrezabal, who said that Bandrés felt "honored, deeply moved and thankful".

The "Lagun Onari" prize is awarded to those individuals or entities who, although not being Basque, have contributed significantly to



the interests, economic promotion and dissemination abroad of the history and culture of the Basque Country. Former recipients of the awards have included the Argentinean Republic, the State of Idaho, the ex-president of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, the Italian Francesco Cossiga, the historian William A. Douglas, the President of Chile Eduardo Frei and the Uruguayan Julio María Sanguinetti.

The Lehendakari defined the Statutes as "an agreement between different Basques who decide to live together"

On this occasion, Mexico was presented with the award for the fraternal relations this country has maintained with the Basque people for centuries and for the solidarity shown by its institutions at a humanitarian level during the Spanish civil war, when thousands of Basques were given a safe haven in that country. The Mexican ambassador in Spain, Jorge Zermeño Infante, was given the job of collecting the award. During his speech, he highlighted the fact that the history of the Basque Country has close links with that of Mexico and recalled that many Basque emigrants gave their support "in the struggle for independence" of that country. After mentioning the welcome given to 25,000 Civil War exiles, "including 2000 Basques", the Ambassador declared that "today we continue to enjoy close ties with the Basque community with deep roots in Mexico, where more than 150 Basque companies have set up business".

The Lan Onari awards are given to Basques who have distinguished themselves for their dedication, steadfastness and spirit of initiative in the development of their professional activities. The highlight of the presentation ceremony was the emotional address by Edurne Pasaban and the speech by Iñaki Gabilondo, the San Sebastian-born journalist who presented a passionate defence of the Statutes and recalled that they had brought Basques together following their abolition during the Franco dictatorship. "Will we have to wait until the Statutes are withdrawn again for Basques to get together once more?" he asked.



Guests at the ceremony

Lehendakari Patxi Lopez was the next to speak. He defined the Statutes as "an agreement between different Basques who decide to live together, an agreement that respects these differences and resolves our problems with the tools made available to us through the terms of our self-government". Lopez rejected making a "stubborn vindication of a specific document", but defended "that way of understanding and securing the coexistence between different citizens with equal rights".

The Lehendakari ended his speech by making three wishes for the future. "We want liberty in order to be free. We want freedom of choice so that each person can decide his or her own future. And we want tolerance so that we can coexist in peace".

"Will we have to wait until the statutes are withdrawn again for Basques to get together once more?" Gabilondo wondered.

During the ceremony, a video was shown which paid tribute to those persons who made the approval of the Statutes of 1936 and 1979 possible and to those who have taken part in its development and growth over recent years. The song "Mendian gora haritza", composed by Imanol with words by Xabier Amuriza, was played over black and white images of key personalities in the recent history of the Basque Country, such as Jose Antonio Aguirre, Ramon Rubial and Carlos Garaiokoetxea and ended with the swearing in of Patxi Lopez in Gernika.

The band of the Basque Police, Ertzaintza, which had played the hymn of the Basque Country at the beginning of the ceremony, brought this to a conclusion with the "Gernikako arbola". This was the climax of an event in which the walls of the Lehendakaritza were festooned with photographs of the men and women who, from Lehendakari Aguirre until today, have worked for the Basque Country and for its self-government.