

## Civil Guard officers may face disciplinary action after mass protest

STAFF REPORTER, Madrid

The head of Spain's police forces, Joan Mesquida, has ordered an internal inquiry to decide whether 3,000 Civil Guards should face disciplinary action for participating in a protest in Madrid.

The demonstration last weekend was considered historic by organizers, marking the first time that uniformed Civil Guard officers had protested in public in support of better working conditions.

Under the Civil Guard's regulations, officers are denied the right to assemble, form unions or protest because of the military nature of the force. However, those restrictions are the principal source of gripes among officers, who are demanding that they receive equal treatment to the civilian National Police.

Saturday's protest in Madrid's Plaza Mayor was organized by the AUGC, an association of Civil Guard officers, and supported by the CC OO labor union.

Though on Monday Interior Minister José Antonio Alonso had said he did not believe the protest warranted disciplinary action, he told senior commanders Tuesday to respond to any sign of "indiscipline" in the ranks.

Officials are concerned that if the rules are allowed to be bent for the Civil Guard, members of the armed forces could follow suit.

The government recently presented a bill that would seek to improve the working conditions of Civil Guard officers, bringing them close to those of the National Police.

## Sizing deal gets dressing down

Medical and textile groups feel unifying criteria should become law

STAFF REPORTER

Madrid

Medical associations and textile makers yesterday applauded the announced deal between the government and the fashion industry to unify clothing sizes, although many deemed it insufficient.

Under the voluntary agreement, manufacturers will use unified criteria to label their garments, avoiding the current situation whereby the same woman can wear a size 36, 38, 40 or even 42, depending on the brand.

Stores also pledge to remove mannequins under a size 38, while the government will underwrite a study to determine the real measurements of the average Spanish woman. Under the deal, a size 46 will no longer be displayed in the "Special Sizes" section of stores.

The Spanish Society of Endocrinology and Nutrition, SEEN, said that the agreement will go some way toward relieving the "psychological pressure" felt by women due to unrealistic examples set by the fashion world.

But SEEN recalled how a similar self-regulatory agreement was reached three years



A model in last year's Pasarela Cibeles. / BERNARDO PÉREZ

ago and promptly forgotten. The association recommended a binding garment industry regulation "similar to those used for other products such as washing

machines." The medical association said that despite the good intentions, eating disorders do not depend only on the size pants a woman wears, but also on the examples set by store-window mannequins.

An anorexia and bulimia support group, Adaner, echoed this sentiment, calling for a binding law.

"You either legislate on things or you have nothing more than a statement of good intentions, because experience has shown us that deals are not kept," said Carmen González, spokeswoman for Adaner. Still, González said she hopes the deal means that the industry now has a greater awareness of the problem.

Meanwhile, the textile association Acotex, which has been requesting a unified sizing criteria for years, said the new deal should be extended to all members of the European Union.

In Catalonia, the regional government applauded the government's move and said that the region was trying to close a similar, local agreement.

## Measurements of accused rapist's penis to be used as evidence in court

S. H., Madrid

A court in Jaén has authorized the admission of the measurements of a man's penis in court as evidence in an attempt to prove his innocence against charges of rape.

The public prosecutor in the case claims that the girl in question refused Ojiffar A.'s sexual advances, and that he raped her. The man's lawyer, Amando Moreno, argues that the sex was consensual, and plans to use the dimensions to prove that a tear in her vagina and consequent bleeding was due to the man being "well endowed" rather than his having raped her. The necessary tests will be carried out by a forensic scientist from the Institute of Legal Medicine.

Ojiffar A., a 37-year-old Nigerian, is accused of raping three women between 1998 and 2002. According to the public prosecutor, the first assault is said to have taken place on October 8, 1998, when the man is alleged to have raped the aforementioned girl, who at the time was a minor and one of his roommates. He then supposedly sexually assaulted his girlfriend's sister in February 1999, after bumping into her in the entrance to his building. He is accused of having assaulted another girl he met in the entrance three years later.

The man's trial is due to begin on March 7. If found guilty, the public prosecutor is requesting a sentence of 30 years in jail and the payment of €20,000 in compensation.

## The scourge of the crop field

New study reveals how chemicals banned in many EU countries but permitted in Spain are causing a range of disorders in unborn children



Research has linked different pesticides — used in southern Spain, and detected in placentas — to lower birth weights.

DAVID SEGARRA, Barcelona

An accumulation of pesticides in women living in agricultural regions of southern Spain may be having an impact on the health and development of their unborn children, a new study shows.

The findings by a team at the San Cecilio University Hospital in Granada are based on the analysis of 150 placentas from women who lived and gave birth in southern Spain, the area with the highest concentration of agricultural greenhouses in all of Europe.

Pesticides used in farming techniques are known to enter workers' bodies as well as those of people who consume the end produce — although before the study, the effects on health were unclear.

The Granada team found that each placenta studied contained traces of at least eight different pesticides. The most common was a compound known as DDE, which results from ingestion of DDT, a pesticide that has been banned for decades in Spain and Europe. It was found in 96 percent of the samples. Other pesticides, such as Endosulfan Diol and Lidane, were found in more than 70 percent of the samples.

According to findings published in the British journal *Placenta* last year, the Granada researchers have linked the higher concentrations of different pesticides in mothers to lower birth weights, and believe they may also be connected with more severe problems.

"Mothers whose placentas experienced greater biological activity due to the combined effects of

contaminating pesticides — the so-called cocktail effect — had a greater risk of giving birth to boys with malformations of the testi-

cles and penis," Nicolás Olea, the researcher who led the study, says.

Other research has also suggested that there may be serious

health consequences for unborn babies due to their mother's exposure to pesticides. A report published recently in medical journal

*The Lancet* showed that chemical exposure can cause brain damage during fetal development, which can manifest itself in childhood as mental retardation as well as other neurological disorders. Even more widely cited problems are memory difficulties, a general lack of coordination, slower response times and attention deficit.

The evidence is therefore mounting in favor of increasing restrictions on the use of the most dangerous pesticides, if not banning them altogether.

"The proof that Endosulfan was present in the placentas is

The team found that each placenta studied contained traces of eight different pesticides

very interesting," Olea says. "In recent years many European countries have started to ban the use of the pesticide because of its toxicity and the way it accumulates in people's bodies. Unfortunately, in Spain the process of phasing out its use has been stalled."

The consequences may not just affect unborn children. Another study recently published by the Granada team indicates that the pesticides can change the hormonal balance in young men.

"We're asking: what is the effect of multiple chemical compounds on their bodies? We will only know in time," Olea says.