

Madrid rocked by car bomb

From Madrid Bureau Chief, Al Goodman

MADRID, Spain (CNN) -- Explosives packed in a small truck detonated Wednesday morning in Madrid after a warning call in the name of the Basque separatist group ETA.

An emergency services official said at least three people were slightly injured in the blast in northeastern Madrid's San Blas district, with another 15 complaining of "ear damage" from the explosion.

Calling it an "ETA terrorist attack," Interior Minister Jose Antonio Alonso told the Spanish Senate the bomb made of 40 to 45 pounds (18 to 20 kilograms) of explosives caused a "considerable explosion."

He also said the truck used in the attack was stolen Tuesday from a village near Madrid.

Speaking ahead of Alonso, Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero pledged the government would continue fighting terrorism, vowing to defeat it.

The Spanish Parliament recently voted to grant the government permission to open peace talks with ETA if it laid down its arms.

The warning call was made to the Basque newspaper Gara, where ETA often makes warnings about its attacks, came ahead of the 9:30 a.m. (3:30 am EDT) explosion, and police had time to clear the area before the explosion, a spokeswoman said.

Gara's Web site said an anonymous phone call in the name of ETA had been made to the newspaper at 8:45 a.m., saying a car bomb would explode 45 minutes later in a Renault Express - a small truck -- parked at the corner of Rufino Gonzalez and Alcala.

Alcala is a major boulevard leading into the center city and runs past the city's main bullring. The bomb was some distance from the facility.

A video camera positioned in the capital showed thick black smoke rising into the morning air.

Judge Ismael Moreno, of the National Court, which handles terrorism cases, was headed to the scene of the car bombing, a National Court official told CNN.

In February, ETA claimed responsibility for a powerful car bomb attack near Madrid's convention center that hurt more than 40 people, sending at least two dozen to hospital.

ETA stands for Euskadi ta Askatasuna, which in the Basque language of Euskara means Basque Homeland and Freedom.

Designated a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union, the group has been blamed for more than 800 deaths since 1968. About 400 ETA members are in prison.

About 2.5 million Basques live in the Pyrenees mountain region along the border between Spain and France -- where their ancestors have lived for 5,000 years.

Another half million live in France. Separatists want to establish a homeland encompassing the three provinces Spain officially recognizes as Basque plus another Spanish province, Navarra, and part of southern France.