

NATIONAL COMMITTEE TO FREE THE CUBAN FIVE

Comité Nacional por la Libertad de los Cinco Cubanos



Gloria La Riva, Coordinator of the National Committee To Free The Cuban Five Speech delivered to the Breaking the Silence conference, Toronto, Nov. 9, 2007

Sisters and brothers, I want to first thank all our Canadian hosts, our wonderful friends in the Canadian Network on Cuba, in the Table de Concertation de Solidarité Québec-Canada, and of course, our sister coalition in the United States, the National Network on Cuba, and all the affiliate organizations, for the great mobilization of forces from our two countries to share experiences, make plans, and fight even harder for the freedom of the Cuban Five.

As Rene González' brother Roberto has said before, "Prison is not a place for men who were saving lives." But U.S. policy from day one of the Cuban Revolution, and even before, is to wreck as much havoc, damage, destruction, and suffering as it possibly can on the Cuban people. From Eisenhower to the current administration, blockade, invasion, biological warfare, terrorist attacks have been financed and planned by Washington. And if you do a good enough job as a terrorist against Cuba, you can even become President, as George Bush Sr. did.

Most of you are aware that one of the biggest acts of terrorism against Cuba was the bombing of the Cuban airliner on October 6, 1976 in which 73 defenseless people suffered terrifying moments, were burned, and died on a plane before it crashed into the sea. That was Oct. 6, 31 years ago, and George Bush Sr. was the director of the CIA, and the two architects of the bombing, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, were long-time CIA agents, trained by the CIA in explosives, armed by the CIA, given passports by the CIA, given every green light to do what they have done in these long 40 years.

And not only was Bosch given permanent residence in Miami in 1990 by George Bush Sr. as President, but his partner in crime, Posada Carriles, knew that he could come into the U.S. two years ago, and despite or in the midst of a very fake kind of prosecution by the Government, of which farce we are still seeing today, he is now living in Miami a free man, and in fact, right now, his art, his so-called art, is being exhibited in a gallery in Miami, as we speak.

In the city where confessed terrorists are heroes, there is no way that the Cuban Five could have had any hope of a fair trial. Of course, they should never have been arrested in the first place. Our esteemed attorney of the Cuban Five, Leonard Weinglass, who represents Antonio Guerrero, will speak next on the legal aspects of the case. But I need to remark on one part of the case, and that was the first appeal of the Five, the appeal that was made to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in the first stage of the federal appeals in the United States, which was heard before three judges. They heard the appeal and 26 months after the briefs were first handed in, in Atlanta, 26 months later after the briefs were filed, on August 9, 2005, over two years ago, an historic decision was issued. The three-judge panel ordered a new trial and overturned the convictions of the Cuban Five. It was unprecedented, and I hope we'll hear more from Len about it.

It was August 9, 2005. And I'll never forget that day, when Len called us in the morning, and said, "We won!" It was a sweeping victory. We were screaming and shouting, laughing and crying, and I know we would call people from all over the country and you could hear the hubbub in the background. It was unbelievable. Because we know that if there were another trial in another city in the United States, with the experience gained by the attorneys, with the discovery of even more terrorist attacks since the first trial, with being outside of Miami, we were extremely optimistic that the Five would have been exonerated.

And the U.S. Government knows that. In fact, by law a trial would have already taken place by February of this year. It would already have been over. But the U.S. Government does not want a trial, because the U.S. Government, and its policy of terror against Cuba, would have been the ones put on trial.

And what happened to our victory? Disgracefully but not surprisingly, the U.S. Government, through its agent Alberto Gonzalez and the Justice Department, appealed, and the Miami Attorney's office appealed the decision. And one year later, exactly the same date, in what could only have been a political decision to make it that day, on August 9, 2006, the full panel of 12 judges, in an extremely conservative court, ruled to uphold the trial and reinstated the convictions and sentences of the Five. It was a cruel and

very bitter blow to our brothers — Gerardo, Ramon, Antonio, Fernando, and René — who have had to suffer two more years of imprisonment, and face possibly years more. It was horrible to the families who are missing the warmth and presence of their loved ones. And to all the Cuban people, who have had to endure another ordeal of U.S. injustice for being Cuban and being independent.

Sisters and brothers, we're meeting here to strategize on what to do in the coming period until the Five are free. I want to stop here a second to say that, as probably most of you know, and you can read on the different websites including freethefive.org, we are waiting for a decision right now on the remaining issues that were set aside by the three-judge panel before. So we don't know when that decision, but we are waiting for the appeal, and we are cautiously optimistic. But until the Five are free, we're talking today, and we'll talk tomorrow, about every day as our brother Ernesto mentioned, every day being an action for the Five of all sorts. I won't even go into that, of the outreach, day-to-day work.

And we in the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five in the United States, we've had the experience, since we formed six years ago, days after the conviction, that when we all pull together, was when we were most effective. Of course, all the initiatives have to take place in our local areas. But when everybody pulled together for the New York Times ad, which was the biggest victory at that point, for March 3, 2004, only a week before the oral arguments were heard in Miami, every committee in the world that existed at the time, sent us donations, and did organization in preparation for the ad, without a word of text being issued until the last moment when it finally published. With faith and solidarity, everybody cooperated. And before that, a year before, when the Five were put in these horrible solitary confinement, which is more than the usual punishment, cells, it was a special administrative measure, by then Attorney-General John Ashcroft, we didn't know how long it would last but it was a minimum one-year order, when we issued the emergency call, and people sent letters instantly to Washington, to the different Government agencies, and to the Bureau of Prisons, that helped a great deal, along with the work of the attorneys, to get them out of the hole after a month.

That was an order by John Ashcroft that was interrupted. It was when we worked together. And we are making a call, we are announcing it today, we're going to issue it through a massive mailing in the United States this weekend, and also through our website this week, we're issuing an international and national call to every organization across the globe, to coordinate in every city, to work with other organizations who are not currently involved, to prepare for an emergency Day After, and "Week of" actions after the court decision. The concern isn't so much a decision in the three-judge panel that we're waiting for now, the problem is that the Government appeals. And if there's any part of a victory, partial, any kind, whether it's an overturning of any part of the conviction, or a total victory for them, or an ordering of a new trial, the Government will appeal. And we have to demand, "No more appeal! Free the Cuban Five now!"

So if you realize when the decision came down on August 9, 2006, there was denunciation by many groups, including ours, we had a press conference, we issued a statement, but it wasn't a sufficient response to it. We've got to do that now, to prevent the appeals. We have to shame the U.S. Government, and don't that we can't do it. We believe that what we ought to do in the cities, and we should talk about this in the coming days and also by our communiqué when we leave, is that emergency call, get everyone's name, tell them ahead of time say that when we issue that call let's all meet at so-and-so place, whether it's a consulate, embassy, or a U.S. Government symbol, in the United States we have to think of places to go, so that a clamor around the world is heard. And a week of action. We will probably be mobilizing for an emergency demonstration and perhaps direct action in Washington, D.C. as well.

All kinds of things have to be done instantly, as soon as the decision, no matter what the decision is. If it's completely negative, we say "Free the Five!" If it's a partial victory, we say "Free the Five!" And we say "No more appeals!" We shame the Government. See, we have an advantage right now. Posada Carriles is in Miami. And Orlando Bosch is in Miami. And that has helped, greatly, to show the hypocrisy of the U.S., because the media has covered that aspect of the double standard of Posada and Bosch in Miami and the Five in prison. We have a great deal to do, sisters and brothers, but we hope that with this, we are prepared. It could happen tomorrow. The decision could happen next month. It may take a year. It might be another Administration. It might be another party in office. But what we do know is that we will fight every way we can to free the Five.

And they will be free! Que viva Antonio! (Viva!) Que viva Gerardo! (Viva!) Que viva Ramon! (Viva!) Que viva Fernando! (Viva!) Que viva René! (Viva! Volveran!)