

FREE THE (FORGOTTEN) CUBAN FIVE!

January 9, 2015. Last December 17th, President Obama announced the release of the three remaining convicted five Cuban spies and the intention to normalize relations with the Castro military dictatorship with no human rights conditions on the agenda. Cuba had purportedly committed to free 53 political prisoners. The White House has refused to make the list of prisoners public concerned that “publicizing it would make it more difficult to ensure that Cuba follows through...,” although some have reportedly already been released. The secret list should include all persons jailed for exit attempts in which no undue violence was exerted, considered “illegal” by the Cuban regime. In particular, we hope for the release of five men wasting away in dreadful dungeons since 2003 for a hastily planned and foiled hijacking attempt to flee Cuba for the United States. Although they took over a passenger ferry for several hours, they employed no violence and no one was hurt. Cuba considers their deed a “very grave act of terrorism” and has rejected requests for clemency.



Harold Alcalá, Yoanny González, Maykel Delgado, Ramón Grillo, and Wilmer Ledea

Harold Alcalá Aramburo, age 35, **Yoanny Thomas González**, age 36, **Maikel Delgado Aramburo**, age 40, and **Ramón Henry Grillo**, age 40, are serving the 13th year of *life* sentences. Just in their twenties when the incident took place, they are held at Combinado del Este prison of Havana in diminutive and hermetically-sealed cells allowing almost no movement. Walking and stretching their legs is only permitted during 2-hour family visits every 45 days; their allotted 25-minute weekly phone calls are regularly reduced to just 10 minutes. Harold in particular is in very ill health, suffering from pancreatitis, chronic dermatitis, a kidney ailment, and a heart condition; he is only able to eat fruit. **Wilmer Ledea Pérez**, was only 19 when sentenced to 30 years; recently moved to a work camp, he is now allowed a 5-day home pass every 25 days.



The three masterminds of the escape plan, Enrique Copello Castillo, age 23, Bárbaro Leodan Sevilla García, age 22, and Jorge Luis Martínez Isaac, age 40, (adjacent photos) were executed by firing squad April 11th 2003. Their death sentences were delivered just five days after the incident. Two days later —without warning or farewells with loved ones— they were taken from their cells in the early morning hours and executed. Their families received a 6AM call to go to the cemetery; when they arrived, they had already been buried. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights detailed the extreme lack of due process and

denounced the “arbitrary deprivation of life.” Many governments and world leaders strongly condemned the atrocity.

Seeing no prospects for a decent life in their country, many Cubans are desperate to leave. But, article 215 of the Penal Code forbids citizens from leaving without government permission. Even helping those planning to escape implies years of prison and stealing property in the process is punishable with death (since most property is in state hands, vessels must be stolen). Cuba Archive has documented the following toll in exit attempts from Communist Cuba: 14 executions, 9 forced disappearances, 62 extrajudicial killings, 6 killed by mines, and 977 drowned, killed, or missing in escapes by sea or air. Thousands more deaths are estimated that are not properly documented.

The international community must hold Cuba accountable for its persistent and egregious human rights’ violations and demand the abrogation of all laws and practices that institutionalize repression and require international monitoring of the prisons. Over the course of decades, prisoners have been released to satisfy certain timely international demands, but soon more are incarcerated. On this 57th year of the Castro dictatorship, countless thousands languish in prison for “crimes” unique to totalitarian regimes: photographing a raid on peaceful dissidents, distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or seeking to escape the country. Many economic activities are considered “crimes” —including killing one’s own cow to feed the family— and hundreds serve prison for just the presumed *propensity* to commit acts against the socialist order (“pre-criminal “dangerousness”). A few “prisoners of conscience” and “political prisoners” get minimal international public attention, but the vast majority is entirely forgotten by the outside world although their incarceration is a direct result of political oppression. Cuba’s huge prison population endures abhorrent conditions and a multitude of abuses regardless of cause of captivity. Devastating medical conditions and alarming rates of self-mutilation, suicide, deaths from lack of medical care, and extrajudicial killings are the order of the day. See accounts on the Committee to Protect Journalists’ page at <https://cpj.org/blog/2010/11/a-freed-cuban-journalist-tries-to-forget-his-tortu.php#more>.

All rights reserved. Distribution and use of this information is authorized as long as its source is cited.