

Oscar Lopez Rivera to Be Freed After 35 Years in U.S. Prisons



Washington, January 18 (RHC)-- The United States government has announced the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera, who has been imprisoned for more than 35 years for his struggle to free Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial rule.

Outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama commuted Oscar Lopez' sentence, which will expire on May 17, according to a list of commutations announced by the White House.

Lopez was born in Puerto Rico in 1943 and upon returning to Chicago after serving in the Vietnam War, he joined the struggle for Puerto Rican independence from the U.S. and participated in acts of civil disobedience.

In 1976, he joined the clandestine struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico as a member of the Armed Forces of National Liberation, the FALN. In 1981, he was arrested by the FBI and accused of "conspiracy" for his militancy in the FALN.

At the time of his capture, he proclaimed himself a prisoner of war, protected by the First Protocol of the Geneva Convention of 1949. The protocol protects Lopez from prosecution for having been arrested in a conflict against colonial occupation.

The U.S. did not recognize Lopez' demand and sentenced him to 55 years in prison. After an alleged escape attempt, the sentence was increased to 70 years in prison, 12 of which he spent in solitary confinement.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton in 1999 offered him a pardon, along with 13 other FALN members who accepted, but Lopez rejected it because it did not include all of his comrades. Leaders from around the world, including Nobel Peace Prize winners and human rights organizations, have long demanded his release.

On June 18, 2012, the U.N. Decolonization Committee approved a resolution, promoted by Cuba, which called for the recognition of Puerto Rico's right to independence and self-determination and urged the release of all pro-independence prisoners in the United States.

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