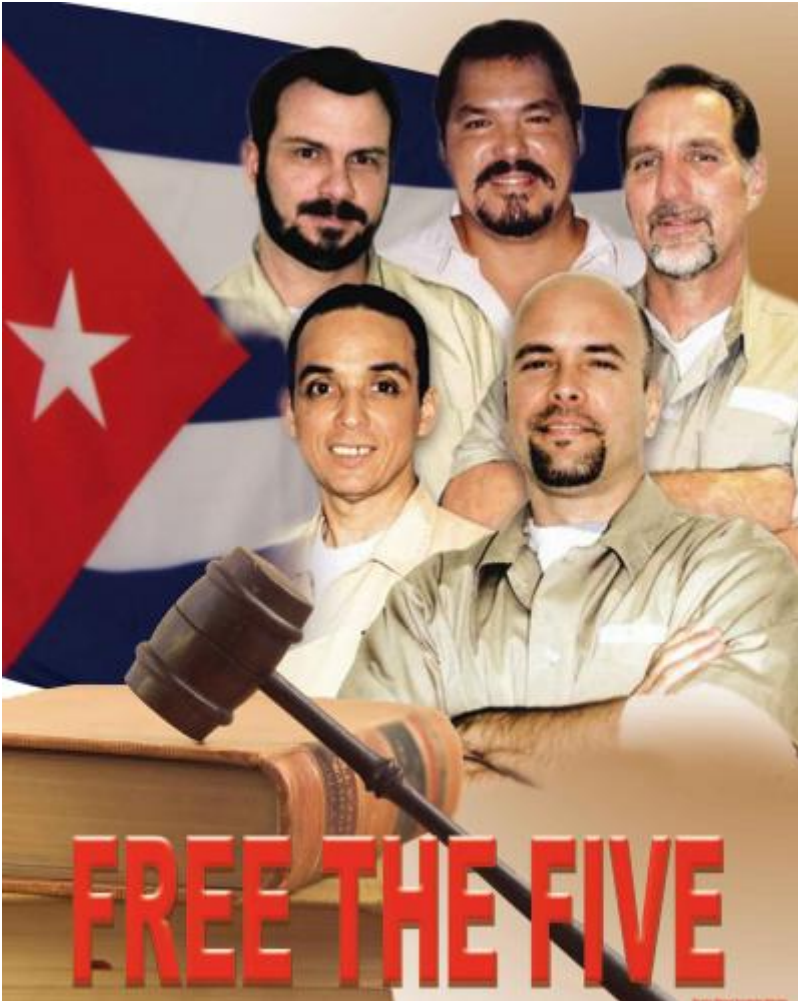


# *Latin America Welcomes Release of the Cuban Five*

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Parana, December 18 (RHC-PL) -- Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has described the release of three counter-terrorist fighters imprisoned more than 16 years ago in the United States as an "historic victory."

Speaking at the 47th Summit of heads of States of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) in the northern city of Parana, the president praised also the decision of normalizing the relations between Cuba and the United States.

Maduro made this comment about the decision announced by President Raul Castro in a speech to his nation, of reestablishing their diplomatic relations, which were broken off 53 years ago.

The negotiations between both sides included the release of the Cuban heroes Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino and Antonio Guerrero, in prison since 1998, and the U.S. agent Alan Gross, jailed in Cuba since 2009. The Venezuelan president recognized the courage of this gesture by President Barack Obama, which he said was perhaps the most important gesture

during his term of office. He also welcomed the support to this decision from Pope Francis, the 'Latin American Pope,' as he called him, whose birthday was on Wednesday.

Ecuador also welcomed the release of the three Cuban counter-terrorists and congratulated the Cuban and U.S. Governments for the steps taken, Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño posted in his Twitter account.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos called the announcement of the United States and Cuba starting a process to reestablish their diplomatic relations "a great news for the region and the world".

The Mexican Government welcomed the historic normalization of the diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, said an official communique by the Foreign Affairs Secretary's Office.

Mexico recognized the historic value of the decision by the Governments of Cuba and the United States

of normalizing their diplomatic relations. The Government of President Enrique Peña Nieto said it celebrates the measures announced by both countries regarding political dialogue and openness in different areas.

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