Puerto Rican Independence Leader Oscar López Rivera Freed After 36 Years in Prison

San Juan, May 17 (RHC-teleSUR)-- Puerto Rican independence leader Oscar López Rivera was released Wednesday from house arrest in Puerto Rico after former U.S. President Barack Obama commuted his sentence in January, just days before Donald Trump was inaugurated.

In early February, López Rivera was transferred from the Terre Haute penitentiary in Indiana -- where the leading activist spent about two-thirds of his 36 years in prison -- to his daughter's home in Puerto Rico. His electronic bracelet was removed one day before his official release on Wednesday.

Oscar López Rivera was born in Puerto Rico in 1943 and later moved to the United States. After being drafted to serve in the Vietnam War and returning to Chicago, López Rivera joined the struggle for Puerto Rican independence.

In 1976, he joined the fight for Puerto Rican freedom from U.S. colonial rule as a member of the Armed Forces of National Liberation, also known as FALN. He was arrested in 1981 and charged with "seditious conspiracy" for his role in a variety of FALN activities.

During his trial, López Rivera and other FALN activists told the court their actions were part of an anti-colonial war against the U.S., declaring themselves prisoners of war and requesting that their cases be handed over to an international court. That request was denied, and Lopez Rivera was eventually sentenced to 55 years in prison — a sentence almost 20 times longer than those handed down for similar offenses.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton offered Oscar López Rivera a pardon in 1999, but the independence activist rejected it in an act of solidarity with other Puerto Rican activists who had not been offered clemency. He also refused to publicly renounce the right of colonized peoples to resist through armed struggle.

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