

# *Oscar López Rivera Vows to Continue Fight for Puerto Rican Independence*

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San Juan, May 18 (RHC)-- In his first hours of freedom after 36 years behind bars in U.S. prisons, Puerto Rican independence leader Oscar López Rivera vowed Wednesday to continue to fight for the freedom and independence of Puerto Rico while expressing solidarity with progressive movements across the Americas.

"During the years I was jailed, I always knew I would return home," López said during a press conference in San Juan. He thanked all the progressive organizations and world leaders who supported him and worked for his release over the years.

"You have a Puerto Rican that has never promoted sectarianism. I come here to fight and work, that's what I know how to do," López Rivera said. "We can make Puerto Rico the nation that it has the potential to be."

The life-long freedom fighter for Puerto Rico's decolonization and independence thanked Pope Francis, Argentina's Grandmothers and Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, former Uruguayan President Jose "Pepe" Mujica, the governments of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba, as well as artists, activists and especially

youth and children.

"It is they who have in their hands the future of our country," said López Rivera, dressed in black to represent his mourning for the friends and relatives who died while he was in jail for the past 36 years and to whom he never had a chance to say goodbye.

He also spoke out about the harsh austerity currently policies rocking the island in the face of a crippling debt crisis, stressing the importance of funding public education and applauding Puerto Rican students for being on the front lines of the struggle to defend education and resist colonial relations with Washington.

"Unity will make decolonization possible, there is no other option," Lopez Rivera said. "Loving our country doesn't cost anything — what will cost us is to lose it."

He also thanked Venezuela and all "those who defend the Bolivarian Revolution" and called for the U.S. to end its interference in the nation. "I ask the U.S. timpresao stop interfering in Venezuela, to stop using people and structures to reach countries and create a hostile environment with violence, and to have people lose because in the end it's the people that lose."

Oscar López Rivera also criticized the financial oversight board put in place last year by U.S. Congress through the controversial law known as PROMESA to restructure the island's debt. He said that nothing that comes out of the oversight board -- which has been widely criticized for undermining Puerto Rico's democracy and deepening colonialism -- will be good for the island nation since it promotes sweeping privatization and gives benefits to international companies instead of small farmers in the country. "They made us their guinea pig to do experiments and make us poorer," he said.

Lopez Rivera's daughter Clarisa Lopez Ramos expressed her appreciation for the worldwide support for her father and for the fight to protect the island's main public post-secondary education institution, the 70,000-student University of Puerto Rico, as it faces massive cuts as part of a harsh austerity plan to tackle the island's massive debt load.

"The daughters and sons of Oscar are the students in the University of Puerto Rico, resisting and fighting," said López Ramos, referring to the student movements that have launched strikes and other actions to protest the cuts. "Thank you, my dad returned home."

Oscar López Rivera returned to the island in February to serve out the final weeks under house arrest after former U.S. President Barack Obama commuted his sentence in January. The activist thanked former U. S. presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who commuted the sentences of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

Recalling when he declined Clinton's 1999 offer for a pardon, the activist said he rejected it since other comrades were still jailed under poor conditions. "I believe in principles, and I believe in not leaving anyone behind."

Finally, he said he will tour the 78 municipalities of the island now that he is free, as he has promised in the past. "Long live Puerto Rico, of love and liberty! Always in resistance and struggle!"

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