

Cuban Barbadian Friendship Association
C/o Israel Lovell Foundation
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Open Letter to President of the United States of America, Barack Obama

Dear President

The Cuban Barbadian Friendship Association, July 26 Movement (Barbados), Cuban Five Justice Committee (Barbados) and all progressive forces in Barbados demand the release of Gerardo Hernandez Nordelo, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez (commonly known as the "Cuban Five") who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in the USA after being convicted of conspiracy to act as agents of the Cuban government and related charges. We are also very concern about the action of the USA government to deny Rene Gonzalez and Gerardo Hernandez the right to receive visits from their wives and the refusal to grant Olga Salanueva the wife of Rene Gonzalez a visa to enter the USA, to visit her husband. International standers emphasize the importance of prisoners maintaining regular contact with their families.

The mission of "The Five" was not to obtain U.S. military secrets, as was charged, but rather to monitor the terrorist activities of those mercenaries and report their planned threats back to Cuba. The arrest and prosecution of these men for their courageous attempt to stop the terror was not only unjust, it exposed the hypocrisy of the USA government claim to oppose terrorism wherever it surfaces.

Nothing reveals this more than the contrast between the U.S. government's handling of the Five's case with that of Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles. Both Bosch and Carriles were members, even leaders, of the Miami terror network and self confessed terrorists, who planted a bomb on a Cubana airline on the 6th October 1976, which exploded in Barbados, killing 73 people from Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Guyana.

When Bosch applied for legal residence in the United States in 1990 an official investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice examined his 30 year history of criminality directed against Cuba and concluded, "...over the years he has been involved in terrorist attacks abroad and has advocated and been involved in bombings and sabotage." Despite that official finding he was granted legal residence by the then President of the United States, George Bush Sr.

The case of Posada Carriles' is no less revealing. A fugitive from justice, he "escaped" from a Venezuela prison in 1985 (with the help of powerful "friends") where he was accused and

prosecuted for master-minding the 1976 bombing of the Cuban airliner.

Twice Posada publicly admitted that he was responsible for a series of bombings in Havana in 1997, in which an Italian tourist was killed and dozens of others were wounded. He was convicted by a Panamanian Court in 2000 for “endangering public safety” by having several dozen pounds of C-4 explosives in his possession, which he intended to use at a public gathering at the University in order to kill President Fidel Castro (along with what would have been hundreds of others, mostly students, who attended that meeting). His long career in violence and terror is undeniable.

He, too, however, became the recipient of inexplicable hospitality from the government of the U.S. His presence in the United States, following a fraudulent pardon by the outgoing President of Panama, was an open secret, but he was reluctantly taken into custody only after giving a televised press conference. He’s now housed by American authorities, not in a prison, but in a special residence inside a detention facility. He faces no prosecutions, only an administrative procedure for “not having appropriate residential documents”, which could lead to his deportation to a country of his choosing. Meanwhile the U.S. has refused to extradite him to Venezuela where he is facing charges related to terrorism.

Such denial of family visits for convicted prisoners would represent a substantial hardship in any case. This is of even more urgent concern in the present cases given the serious questions which have been raised about the fairness of the convictions. As you will be aware, in August 2005 a three-judge panel of the Fourth Circuit Court of appeals overturned the convictions of all of the above prisoners and ordered a retrial. This was based on a finding that the pervasive community prejudice against the Cuban government and its agents in the trial venue and the publicity and events surrounding the trial combined to create a situation where they were unable to obtain a fair and impartial trial. The defendants raised numerous other issues challenging the fairness of the trial which have not yet been addressed by the appeal courts. Meanwhile, in May 2005, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion that the “Five” had been arbitrarily deprived of liberty based on failure to guarantee the right to a fair trial in a number of key areas. We urge the US government in the meantime to take every step to ensure that the “Five” are treated fairly and are not subjected to any undue deprivations while they continue to be incarcerated, including denial of family visits.

Our organisations will continue to remain in solidarity with the Cuban Five and demand their immediate release from prison.

We look forward to hearing from your office.

Yours truly,

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