

Radio Havana Cuba Speaks with Puerto Rican Independence Fighter Oscar Lopez Rivera



Radio Havana Cuba spoke on the phone with Oscar Lopez Rivera, the Puerto Rican independence activist who spent more than 36 years in prison in the United States, and who was released on May 17th.

Lopez Rivera's sentence had been commuted by then-U.S. President Barack Obama back in January. He spent the next four months under house arrest in San Juan, before being able to move around freely and talk with the media.

His continued incarceration had been opposed by the Puerto Rican community in the United States and by many people in the world, including 10 Nobel Peace Prize winners, the widow of Martin Luther King, the now deceased Coretta Scott King, President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Senator Bernie Sanders as well as an international coalition of human rights, and religious, labor, and business organizations.

Several members of the U.S. Congress had also called for his release.

In Cuba, his liberation had been also strongly demanded by organizations and people in general. The Puerto Rican independentista told Radio Havana Cuba that he felt it was solidarity that got him out of jail.

Well, without the support of the solidarity movements, I am sure my release would not have been possible. I'm very appreciative and grateful to the Cuban people. Likewise for the people of Venezuela, of Ecuador, of Bolivia -- people from all justice- and freedom-loving countries. I am deeply grateful to all of them for the support they gave me; without their support I would probably still be in prison today.

RHC asked Oscar Lopez Rivera how his release had been received by people in Puerto Rico.

It has been pretty significant, really, pretty unexpected. The demonstrations of love have been immense, and I have been surprised. For the last two days, in Puerto Rico and in Chicago, the reception has been overwhelming, of great support, not only from Puerto Ricans, but also from people living in the United States, who were there in Chicago to show their solidarity with our struggle. So during these last two days it has been a truly rich experience. Very, very meaningful for the struggle we are waging.

Oscar Lopez Rivera was asked whether he would now continue with his pro-independence struggle.

We are definitely working on that. What we are trying to do is to unite the people around a common issue, in a broad campaign, where all those who love our homeland come together, both those who have left Puerto Rico and those living in Puerto Rico. What we basically want, fundamentally, is to decolonize our homeland and attain our independence.

RHC asked Oscar Lopez Rivera whether he could confirm that a visit to Cuba was in the making.

Well, we are working on it. We had already agreed, we had spoken with the Cuban Friendship Institute about a date in November, so we expect to be in Cuba in November. Around the 12th of November we should be there, in this beautiful and sisterly homeland.

Any message to the Cuban people, we asked.

What I want the most is for the Cuban people to know how deeply grateful I am and how much love I have for this people and their revolution, and the respect I have for those who have lead, who have guided the destinies of the Cuban people. I am deeply grateful, and I think I will never be able to fully express that gratitude, not even visiting Cuba, because it is difficult letting what you have inside be known. For me, it is definitely more than a brotherly people, and we will definitely do everything within our reach to stand up against things like the criminal blockade that the United States maintains against Cuba, and all the interference that the U.S. government keeps conducting in Cuba. Guantanamo has to be given back to the Cuban people, and we will certainly be paying attention to that. And we will work so that the United States stops its meddling in Cuba.

Those were comments to Radio Havana Cuba by Puerto Rican independence activist Oscar Lopez Rivera, on the phone from his native Puerto Rico. Lopez Rivera was serving a 70-year sentence, and he had been in prison since 1981. He is now finally a free man, after more than 36 years behind bars in the U.S., which had turned him one of the world's longest-serving political prisoners -- the Nelson Mandela of our continent.



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