

# *Prominent Cubans Speak about Fidel Castro*

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RICARDO ALARCON

It is very difficult, practically impossible, at a time like this to react in the face of this news. It was feared, to some extent expected, but no one was prepared for it. Fidel used to joke at times over the fact that so many times did they try to kill him, the enemies of the Cuban Revolution announcing his death, that Fidel used to joke, say 'well, when that day comes and it is true, no one will believe it', and indeed nobody is believing it, because it is very hard to think of this country, this continent, and the world in general, without his presence. He will remain present in so many ways. Now, capturing that, putting it in a very few words for an interview is very difficult...

GERARDO HERNANDEZ

The history, the efforts made for the Five to return home, our return, would have been very different had Fidel not been here. The victory of our return has a very special connotation, because Fidel was among us when we came back. We dedicated that victory to him, while he was alive; it was his victory. Remember he was the man who promised his people that the Five would return home, who said so in the darkest of moments; when none thought it would be possible, he said *Volveran*, they will return, and we returned.

What is big about this victory, for us, is that it happened with him being alive, and we know he enjoyed it, and we told him so when we later met with him.

#### OLGA SALANUEVA

The memories are many. In my case, when I got deported back here, I was feeling this need to see him. This was a time when the case of the Five was still not public in Cuba, and I remember there was this rally on 23 and 12 streets where he was going to speak, and that day I went there, 'cause I needed to see him, be close to where he was, and I saw him, speaking with the same energy as always, and I said to myself "I am home, I'm already home". Then, when the case of the Five became known in Cuba, he immediately got in touch with the family. I remember the day in the year 2001, when the Five were declared Heroes of the Republic of Cuba, and I got to talk to him. Then that same year 2001, at the end of the year he invited the families to spend New Year's Eve with him—2002 was going to be named Year of the Heroes Prisoners of the Empire. From then on he was very close, inviting us, the mothers, the wives, the children of the Five, to all functions. And he would come to us, sooth the mothers, hug the wives, always providing encouragement, I would say, like a father.

#### ELIAN GONZALEZ

Fidel was that friend who during those hard times was next to my family, next to my father, he made it possible for me to return and be together with my father, return to Cuba. I will always be grateful to him for that. It is that cherished feeling being able to say 'I am Fidel's friend.' Which was so because Fidel said it publicly, for indeed Fidel was a friend of all.

#### Dr. RODRIGO ALVAREZ CAMBRA

Whatever it was, Fidel was extraordinary at it. I remember once we were on a MayDay parade at the Plaza de la Revolución, and I see that Fidel is looking back, he was looking for me. I was a member of the Central Committee then, and Fidel was happy, this huge parade of millions of Cubans was going by, and I see that he looks back, and I don't know why but I had this feeling that he was looking for me, and he finally spotted me and waved for me... Fidel was worried because the Americans had just attacked Iraq, it was the Gulf War, and he remembered that we had a hospital there with 120 Cuban doctors, a hospital for children with polio, and he was worried about their safety and the safety of the children. So here's Fidel in the middle of a parade in Havana, thinking about the situation of people thousands of kilometers from Cuba.

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