

Oscar López Rivera Returns to Chicago, His Second Home



Chicago, May 19 (RHC)-- Puerto Rican independence hero Oscar López Rivera returned to his second home of Humboldt Park in Chicago on Thursday, a day after he was freed after serving a jail term of more than 36 years.

López Rivera, now 74 years old, moved to Chicago at the age of 14 and returned to the city after participating in the Vietnam War in 1967. Working alongside other Puerto Rican immigrants, he helped build a number of social programs in the area.

He was instrumental in the campaign to create the Roberto Clemente High School, named after the Puerto Rican baseball legend. He also co-founded El Rincón health services for substance abusers and helped establish a local office of ASPIRA, an organization dedicated to supporting the educational development of Latino youth.

José López, Oscar's brother, told the Chicago Reporter that Humboldt Park serves as a base for Puerto Rico's independence struggle. "In many ways, I think you have to understand a little bit of the Puerto Rican presence here and the Puerto Rican independence movement, sort of how you understand the development of the independence movement in India," José told the news website.

"It's Gandhi in South Africa organizing primarily Indians in South Africa that led him to go to India

ultimately and begin the struggle for independence in India because he saw the marginalization of Indian people in South Africa in a colonial setting. So I think that's the way one has to view the relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States and the Puerto Rican presence in the United States vis-a-vis our struggles."

Shortly after his Wednesday release, López Rivera held a press conference in San Juan, vowing to continue to fight for the freedom and independence of Puerto Rico. "During the years I was jailed I always thought I would return home," Lopez said.

"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. We can make Puerto Rico the nation that it has the potential to be."

López Rivera is slated to visit New York City in June to participate in the Puerto Rican Day parade and other community events.

The independence hero was arrested in 1981 by the FBI and charged with "seditious conspiracy," for being a militant anti-colonial fighter.

During his trial, López Rivera and other members of the Armed Forces of National Liberation 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.

The U.S. did not recognize their demand and sentenced Oscar to 55 years in prison. After an alleged attempt to escape, the sentence was increased to 70 years in prison, 12 of which he spent in solitary confinement.

Today, Puerto Rico is still plagued by many of the U.S.-imposed problems that Oscar López Rivera fought against before he was jailed, namely economic and political hegemony. Most notably, forced payment of the \$73 billion debt "owed" to Wall Street creditors, which is being enforced through Washington-led austerity.

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