

# **I will wear the prison uniform with the same honor and pride with which a soldier wears his most prized insignias!**

## **Defense statement presented by Comrade Ramón Labañino Salazar at the sentencing hearing, Thursday, December 13, 2001**

Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I join in all of the arguments put forward by my four brothers in this case and in my recognition of the professional behavior of the officials in this court: Richard, the translators, the marshals, and Lisa.

The criminal attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington took the lives of thousands of innocent people in the United States, and we share in the anger and sorrow of the American people. It is our fervent hope that such events are never repeated.

We who have devoted our lives to fighting terrorism, to preventing atrocious acts like these from taking place; we who have tried to save the lives of innocent human beings not only in Cuba but in the United States as well, stand in this courtroom today to be sentenced precisely for preventing similar acts. Thus, this punishment could not be more ironic and unfair!

The words of George W. Bush, president of this country, in the name of which I am to be sentenced, clearly express the reasons why we came to the United States and why we find ourselves in this courtroom today.

From this very city of Miami, terrorist acts against my country, Cuba, have been planned, organized and directed. From here, the terrorists and their activities are sponsored, encouraged and financed. They are given shelter here as well. To mention just one well-known case, a terrorist and murderer not only of Cubans but of people from the United States as well, Orlando Bosch, freely walks the streets of Miami. And what is most regrettable of all is that all of this takes place with the knowledge and consent of this country's authorities. One need only thoroughly read all of the evidence in our case, which gives a full account of all these kinds of terrorist activities.

Cuba, my country, has suffered more than 42 years of terrorist acts, aggression, invasions and provocations, which have resulted in the deaths of over 3,478 innocent human beings and physical injuries to over 2,099. Cuba, like the United States, has the right to defend itself.

To offer just a few examples:

On March 4, 1960, the French ship **La Coubre** was blown up in the port of Havana by agents of the CIA; 101 people were killed as a result of this terrorist sabotage, including six French sailors.

On October 6, 1976, in a treacherous terrorist attack perpetrated by Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch, through Venezuelan mercenaries, two bombs were detonated on a Cubana Airlines civilian aircraft that had taken off from Barbados, cruelly killing 73 people (57 Cubans, including 24 youths from the Cuban National Fencing Team, 11 young people from Guyana, and five Koreans). Some of these terrorist murderers are in prison today in Panama, and enormous efforts are being made here in Miami to have them set free. Here they are called "patriots" and regarded as symbols; radio stations are raising funds for their defense and possible escape from jail.

There have been 637 attempts on the life of the president of Cuba, Fidel Castro.

Bacteriological terrorism aimed at humans, plants and animals has also been used against my country, with a total of 344,203 people affected and 158 dead, of whom 101 were children.

This is not paranoia, these are lives of innocent human beings!

These terrorist groups we were acting against not only carried out these kinds of activities in Cuba, but also here in the United States. This news report, which is totally public and available to everyone, provides a summary of the terrorist acts committed here in Miami, a total of over 68 acts of violence. This article written by journalist Jim Mullin of the **Miami New Times** on April 20-26, 2000, among many other incidents, reports the following:

1968: Orlando Bosch fires a bazooka from the MacArthur Causeway against a Polish ship (Miami politicians would later declare an "Orlando Bosch Day" to honor this terrorist).

1974: Exile leader José Elías de la Torriente is murdered in Coral Gables for the failure of an invasion he was to lead to Cuba.

1975 Luciano Nieves is murdered after defending peaceful coexistence with Cuba.

1976: Emilio Milán, the news director at WQBA-AM, has his legs blown off by a car bomb after publicly condemning the violence perpetrated by the exile community.

1981: A bomb explodes in the Mexican consulate on Brickell Ave., in protest over Mexico's relations with Cuba.

1996: A bomb explodes in the Little Havana restaurant Centro Vasco, to protest a scheduled concert by Cuban singer Rosita Fornés.

2000: On April 11, outside the home of Elián González' relatives in Miami, radio journalist Scott Piasant de Obregón holds up a T-shirt reading "Send the boy home, it's a father's right," and is physically attacked before the police arrive.

These things did not happen in Cuba. They happened here in the United States, in Miami, in the cities and streets of this country where we all live, where you and your children and families walk every day.

In the 1990s, terrorism, raids and provocations against my country were stepped up, until in 1997 there was a wave of terrorist acts against hotels and other tourism establishments that resulted in the murder of an innocent Italian tourist, Favio Di Celmo.

How many more deaths of innocent human beings must we witness before this insane and absurd policy towards Cuba is ended?

How many more human lives must be lost before the FBI truly fulfills its duty and arrests the real criminals and terrorists who act against the very people of the United States?

Could it be that this "fight against terrorism" is pure rhetoric?

No, common sense would say that it is not. And that is precisely why we are here today, because we do not want any of these things to happen, in Cuba, in the United States, in Miami, or in any other part of the world. All that we have done is this: to try to save the lives of innocent human beings, by preventing terrorism and preventing a stupid war.

The same pattern can be observed in all of the Cuban-American terrorists we know. José Basulto was recruited and trained by the CIA and used in its war against my country, and he has kept up the practice of terrorism and provocation until today, just like the members of such organizations as the Cuban American National Foundation, Alpha 66, Comandos F-4, the Democratic National Unity Party (PUND), Independent and Democratic Cuba (CID), and the many others referred to in our evidence. These terrorists represent to Cuba what the perpetrators of the horrific acts committed against the United States represent to this country.

Cuba has never trusted these characters, and it never will. Nor should the United States trust them, much less protect them. This is a serious mistake, which could explain in part why events like those of September 11 happen.

My country has suffered from terrorism for more than 42 years. Today the United States is suffering, and if this problem is not eradicated at the root, it could continue to suffer tomorrow. Here in the United States there are more than 800 organizations of a violent nature; this country is the one most vulnerable to these kinds of criminal acts. Terrorism is the true enemy of the national security of the United States. Maintaining a stance of inactivity or indifference, or worse yet, of complicity and concealment of terrorists and terrorism, is the worst crime that can be committed against the national security of this nation; and that is precisely what is happening in this case. Those who protect these groups and individuals are the ones really endangering the United States' national security.

And that is why, from this forum, I denounce the law enforcement agencies of the United States that have concealed and failed to take action against terrorism and terrorists!

For many years, Cuba has passed information on to various government agencies in the United States, up to the highest level; detailed, documented information, complete with names and conclusive evidence of criminal acts and murders. Our own evidence in this case is a full array of that information. And even with all this information in their hands, they have done nothing. There has not been a single arrest, or even a single investigation carried out or underway.

With our arrest, all they have attempted to do is to silence the source of information, to keep serious acts of terrorism like these from disclosure and to hide the truth that so brutally hits us today. Moreover, the FBI has conspired with the terrorists themselves and the extreme right wing in Miami to damage and obstruct any kind of rapprochement and cooperation between our two peoples and governments. Meanwhile, the criminals are happily walking the streets outside here today, laughing at this courtroom. There cannot be a greater offense or stain on these authorities, on the flag presiding this courtroom, and on that seal representing the ideal of true justice.

All that Cuba wants is to live in peace and tranquillity. It does not want a war, just as the people of the United States do not want a war. The military leaders of the United States do not want it either, because they know very well that Cuba poses no danger whatsoever to this country. That is why our work has also been aimed at preventing a criminal war, which would only lead to the deaths of innocent people, not only from Cuba, but also from the United States.

At no time have we sought out information that could place the national security of this country in danger. This is pure manipulation, which we will never accept, and a reason for which we decided to come to this trial, in addition to clearly exposing the truth about all of the criminal acts perpetrated from U.S. territory against Cuba and the United States itself.

It is not Cuba that has come to the United States for the purpose of an invasion, aggression, or terrorist acts of all kinds. The reality is the complete opposite, and quite simply, Cuba has the basic right to defend itself. That is all that we have done, without causing harm to anyone or anything.

As long as this criminal policy against my people persists, there will continue to be men like us, as a basic measure of self-defense, just as the United States urgently needs to learn about the inner workings of the terrorist organizations attacking it today. This is a reality that no one can bring to an end.

What the members of the Miami extreme right are really seeking is to create a conflict through some sort of provocation that will result in a U.S. military attack against Cuba. And as I have said, this is not what my people, or my government, or the people of the United States want. General Sheehan's testimony regarding the infiltrations into Cuba by Ramón Saúl Sánchez and his "Democracy" group, revealed that he did not want these elements to provoke a war with Cuba, which

could cost the lives of many young men in the U.S. armed forces. Numerous similar points of view were expressed in this courtroom.

As for the prosecution, we have seen a truly shameful and reprehensible behavior that has nothing to do with justice and the search for truth. They first tried to suppress all of our evidence on the terrorist acts perpetrated both in Cuba and here in the United States. They used every means possible to try to suppress 90% of our evidence in this case, that is, the truth about our mission here.

The prosecutors have manipulated and distorted the facts. They have tried to control this courtroom at all times. They have used both subtle and blatant threats. They have resorted to blackmailing witnesses under the threat of legally incriminating them if they did not plead the Fifth Amendment. They even went so far as to try to blackmail four-star General Charles Whilhem, former chief of the Southern Command, to stop him from testifying for the defense.

There have been attempts to conceal evidence (an 8mm video, when FBI agent Al Alonso prevented the original from being turned over to the defense; this was a key piece of evidence for the most serious charge in this case).

For us, the prosecutors do not represent the government of the United States, and that is why for us, this is not a case of the Government of the United States vs. Gerardo Hernández. Actually, the prosecution has very skillfully represented the small extremist right-wing sector of the Cuban community, terrorists like José Basulto and organizations like Alpha 66, the Cuban American National Foundation and Comandos F-4. They even went so far as to embrace and kiss these individuals right in this courtroom, in full view of everyone here. If something about this trial astonished me, it was the tremendous zeal, the unlimited efforts made by the prosecution and all their advisors to faithfully represent this criminal sector, at any cost.

However, the defense has shown the truth, dignity and the real stance of the American people towards Cuba. It was the defense that brought in generals and other military personnel and civilians who have contributed to carrying out this policy towards my country, such as: General Charles Whilhem; Admiral Atkinson; Colonel Eugene Carroll; Colonel Buckner; Richard Nuccio, former advisor to U.S. President William Clinton on Cuban affairs. Many of them appeared on a fully voluntary basis, and in this small detail lies a very big message for those willing to understand it.

Ladies and gentlemen: this is a time of major changes; we are in the 21st century. Today the United States has relations with China. It has relations with Viet Nam, where 56,000 citizens of this country died. It is taking part in talks with North Korea, and many other countries with which it seemed impossible to have relations. Why not with Cuba?

It is true that to carry out our tasks, we needed to resort to unconventional methods. We have done so for obvious reasons of personal security, and never with the intent of harming anyone, or cheating or deceiving anyone, much less the government or institutions of this country.

The evidence is overwhelmingly clear in all respects, judge us based on it! From the very first day of this trial, we acknowledged our true identities and our responsibilities, but I never accepted, and never will accept, any implication of espionage, or of trying to deceive this country.

I want to express special thanks for the work of our attorneys, for their courage and professionalism. For us, and for everyone, we have won this trial. History will rectify this verdict, and perhaps this sentence as well.

Gentlemen of the prosecution, whether you like it or not, Cuba is an independent and sovereign country. It has its own legitimate government, its own president, its own martyrs and heroes, and its own convictions. Cuba is not different from the United States. And, gentlemen, Cuba must be respected!

We know that efforts were made to ensure an impartial trial. But the city of Miami is not a place where goals like these can be achieved when it comes to Cuba. Perhaps that was the most critical error in our case: holding the trial in this city.

If preventing the deaths of innocent human beings, defending our two countries from terrorism, and preventing a senseless invasion of Cuba are the reasons I am being sentenced today, then I welcome that sentence!

I will wear the prison uniform with the same honor and pride with which a soldier wears his most prized insignias!

This has been a political trial and therefore we are political prisoners!

All of the evidence is here; this is where history is written. And it is history that will do us true justice!

Thank you.

Ramón Labañino Salazar