



Testimony of ADRIANA PÉREZ O'CONNOR,

Wife of Gerardo Hernández, member of the Cuban Five sentenced to two life terms plus fifteen years.

Given at the International Commission of Inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five on Saturday the 8th of March 2014, 15:30 to 16:50, Session 6: Report on the unfairness of the trial against the Cuban Five – Part II.

When the year 1998 began, I knew that it wouldn't be very special because Gerardo would have to depart, and we would have to be far from each other once again. I was however convinced that the great love we professed to each other would get us through our physical separation.

Of course, I was oblivious to what was truly separating me from the rest of the things that I enjoyed so much. Even without this knowledge, the bitter taste of our farewell in January 1998 worsened still with the tragic news of the unexpected death of Gerardo's older sister in an airplane crash. This was after we had enjoyed a lovely holiday and celebration of my birthday – the last we spent together.

I thought that Gerardo's mother had already experienced too much pain for one year – a son's distance and a daughter's death aren't easy to overcome. In retrospect I know that this attitude was a place far removed from the reality that I would later face.

Exactly seven months after his sister's accident and eight after the last kiss Gerardo and I shared, I suffered the heaviest blow of my twenty-eight years on this earth. Surprise, pain, tears, desperation, uncertainty, isolation, and I don't know how many other feelings that can unite you with heaven and earth at the moment I received the news of the arrest of my husband and other Cubans, as well as the true nature of his work and sacrifice: to carefully observe the actions of Miami organizations that were orchestrating terrorist attacks against the people of Cuba. Their only interest was to infiltrate these groups in order to discover their plans and avoid the attacks that might be conducted against our country, where many have died or otherwise been victimized already as by this kind of aggression. This attempt to evade violence was the only goal of their work in the United States.

It has been more than fifteen years since these awful events, and I never imagined that my life would take such a violent turn. Since then I have comprehended the full weight of the vengeful hatred that motivates North American politics.

My husband received the highest possible sentence for performing all of his duties: two life imprisonments plus fifteen years, after a trial marred by irregularities and manipulations. The violation of human rights was not confined to the incarcerated Cubans – it extended also to us, their families, who have suffered and continue to suffer as arbitrary victims of an empire.

I've been denied twelve times a request for a visa so that I might visit my husband. It's been argued that I represent a security threat to the United States, that I might be reunited with inappropriate persons or terrorist organizations, and I've even been accused of trying to stay in the United States as an immigrant or being an agent of the Cuban government. My only motivation for getting a visa and traveling to the US is to see my husband who has been condemned to die in prison. My right to visit my husband to this point has been cruelly trampled upon in a form of psychological torture. The visa issue remains an obstacle to my visiting him regularly.

Twelve years ago, the United States Government granted me a visa to travel there, and the FBI submitted me to an interrogation. After eleven hours, they ordered my return to Cuba without explanation. It was a difficult moment that reaffirmed one more time the US Government's intentions regarding the Five. Once I had obtained the visa, there weren't supposed to be any more obstacles because I had never had a problem with the law in North America. Sentenced for one year, other family members had visited him and thought that all pressures would have ceased, but when I arrived at the airport they separated me from the line and interrogated me, and the authorities of this country, who by the way were not migration officials, ordered my return to Cuba. Conscious that the wait would be long, I went back without seeing my husband. He was careful to know when the visit would be and what time I would arrive at the airport in Houston. The uncertainty increased, and we always expected the United States to try something. They made a show of their power.

This is the moment that started a struggle that has gone on till this day and will go on still. There have been many claims and allegations made by judicial, religious, political, and labor-related national and international individuals and organizations, including Amnesty, who from early on recognized these violations. Our strength and our will have not and will not be dented by heartbreaking obstacles.

Consequences, like the absence of children in Gerardo and my marriage, a dream deferred and perhaps permanently endangered by my biological clock, have added further injuries to the time we've spent separated but not absent from one another's lives. Still we haven't let it destroy our shared happiness. So too we've transcended the loneliness of a maximum-security prison, and the withholding of correspondence intended to isolate my husband from the outside world.

It is a just cause that we defend, and the hope to return to our life together as soon as possible keeps us active. The only future is his return – the denial of this will be a much greater blow than what we've each already dealt with.

I don't pretend that there aren't moments of sadness, nostalgia, and homesickness, but he has assured me that everything we've experienced will be reversed for a better future, in the form of a permanent union with my husband, partner, and friend, which we will enjoy as though the time was never chopped down.

Upon waking up you shake and say, "Today I have no time to spend on nostalgia or sadness. I only have time to fight for his final return."