



**Testimony of ELIZABETH PALMEIRO CASADO,**

**Wife of Ramón Labañino, member of the Cuban Five sentenced to thirty 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.**

In 1998, my family was a happy family even though my husband, Ramón Labañino Salazar, used to be away from home for long periods of time. Because of that, I assumed the care and education of our daughters and gave attention to an older daughter of Ramón from a previous marriage.

Ramón returned home every 18 months. He left behind personal plans and dreams like to be present for the birth and growth of our children. Some important missions demanded from him and so many other Cubans to risk their own lives to go to Miami, Florida to infiltrate among persons who planned and carried out terrorist actions to overthrow the Cuban government. These criminal actions started at the very beginning of the revolution in 1959.

Our daughters and I waited for him to share moments that were impossible to share in a common way as any other family. Every time he was off from his mission, we enjoyed visiting our friends. We went to the beach; we played in amusement parks and had family meetings. In those moments, he was filled with the love of his daughters. He used to play with them all around the house.

In every visit Ramón was happy to see them growing and they never forgot him as a beloved father. Although we had few days together, we were very happy. Those were decisive moments in the creation of our family. The love that united us. The support of Ramón at any moment helped me to push ahead and make our dreams come true.

On September 12th, 1998, our daughters and I were far from knowing what happened in Miami. At the time, we were not aware of the real mission of Ramón when far from home. Our girls could not understand. For me it was a complete surprise. I knew Ramón was doing important actions in favor of our people but never imagined he was risking his own life in such a way. For security reasons, he kept me away from the real nature of his work.

On Monday, September 14th, they were presented in court. The same day I was informed in Cuba of the arrest of my husband in Miami. He acted with a false identity. We could not have contact either. Nobody could know that Luis Medina was in fact the father of my daughters and my husband, Ramón Labañino Salazar.

Ramón and his four brothers stayed in isolation cells for 17 months, and we were for more than 27 months without communication: no letters, no phone calls, and no visits at all.

During this time, I tried to continue my life as normal as possible. I took care of my daughters keeping in mind that someday Ramón would contact us. I had to stand strong for us and for him.

Finally, we talked by phone for the first time after 27 months of silence. It was in January 2001. Ramon sounded optimistic and happy to know his daughters and I were fine. Even though I was so sad by this time, I did my best not to compromise the happiness of being in contact again.

We lived hard moments during the trial and the sentence hearings.

Miami is the last place in the US that should harbor a trial against Cuban patriots defending the Cuban revolution. They could not receive a fair trial in such a hostile city. The judge denied all motions to change the venue. The five were found guilty of all charges.

I applied for a visa to be present in those unforgettable days. The visa was granted late, I could not be there, nor could a relative of Ramón be there for him.

He was sentenced to one life prison term plus 18 years. In 2009 after a long appeal process, during the resentencing hearings in Miami Ramón was resentenced this time to 30 years in prison. He is supposed to be released in October 2026.

We were far from imagining how difficult it would be to visit Ramón in prison. Although my government expressed its disposition to support us in all that was necessary to visit our relatives, the government of the USA has continually put obstacles in our way to make those visits difficult and, in some cases, impossible.

In December of 2001, the American government granted me the visa the same day as Ramón's sentencing hearing. I was not at the hearing but I could meet Ramón for the first time in more than 3 years at the Miami FDC<sup>1</sup>.

Ramon was transferred to a maximum-security prison in Beaumont, Texas. Our daughters and I went to visit him there. For the first time our family was reunited.

---

<sup>1</sup> Federal Detention Center.

Lizbeth met her father, Laura rediscovered him after 4 years. At least we enjoyed the fact of being together.

The guards did not allow suspicious acts or any kind of movements of the girls. They did not understand because their father could not walk around in the visitation room, nor play with them and embrace them as he wished.

During the Bush administration, my family suffered severe irregularities in the process of getting a visa to enter the US and visit Ramón. Visas were delayed for many months. We could visit Ramón less than once a year.

During those 8 years, Ramón spent 2 years and a half without family visits.

The visas were limited to just 30 days. We have limitations of movement. We cannot attend any meeting. Visas are granted under many preconditions: no public presentations, no media interviews to denounce the injustice. In case of any violation of the conditions, they would revoke the visas or they would deny us later applications.

The visas to enter US territory have been used to deprive us of visits to the Five. The visa is used to cause more pain and suffering to the fact of being unjustly in prison, far away from home and family in a foreign country. The American government tried to destroy our families.

Having the visas and being able to travel is not a guarantee to see Ramón.

The visits to the different prisons where my husband has been: USP Beaumont, Texas, USP McCreary, Kentucky, FCI Jesup, Georgia, FCI Ashland, Kentucky have been marked by long distances by airplanes and by cars. We have no support from our personnel in the Cuban interest section in Washington because they are not allowed by the US authorities to visit Ramón with us. We can visit Ramón thanks to the support of solidarity friends that make it possible for us to get to those remote places where the prisons are located.

In all maximum-security prisons, where my husband was confined for several years, the inmate population is highly dangerous and aggressive. Because of that, there were many disturbances, fights and other problems. Those situations provoked total closings of the prisons or lockdowns. During those days, Ramón remained in his cell without being able to take a bath, with very limited meals, snacks or small sandwiches, no access to telephone calls, and no visits.

When our stay coincided with a lockdown, we could not carry out the programmed visits.

In early 2008, the oldest daughter of Ramón, Aili, by this time 18 years old, could not visit her father in the USP Beaumont in Texas. During the time she was there, there was a lockdown for 45 days. She returned to Cuba before the expiration of her visa without any contact with Ramón. Aili returned home with the pain and stressful experience of being so close yet so far from her father at the same time. Ramón did not receive the letters that she sent him from the house of the friends she stayed with in those days.

The same thing happened to me and our daughters of 9 and 13 years old in June 2006. We could only visit Ramón one weekend out of four possible weekends. In May 2009 while in Kentucky to visit Ramón at the USP McCreary, there was a lockdown due to a flu breakout. The center for the control of disease demanded that the prison follow the protocol and we could not extend our time in the USA to visit Ramón. In that instance, we saw Ramón just two weekends. We went back to Cuba without saying goodbye to him.

The lockdowns are not the only cause of Ramón's lack of communication with the outside world. Sometimes he has been sent to isolation cells before or after a transfer to another prison.

Inmates are isolated when they do something wrong in the prison, but Ramón had been sent to the hole for so-called security reasons several times.

In 2009, he stayed in the hole for two months waiting to be transferred to FCI Jesup, in Georgia. Early 2012 he spent more than one month in isolation cells during the transfer to FCI Ashland, Kentucky. All those days we did not know anything about Ramón's status until he arrived at the final destination.

In January 2012, Ramón's father, his brother, and his older daughter went to visit him in FCI Jesup, Georgia. They could not do more than three visits because of a lockdown and the transfer to the FCI Ashland.

The authorities of the prison did not take into consideration the fact that some relatives coming from Cuba where there to visit him.

The scanners and surveys we must get through to enter the visitation room are very severe. Sometimes these obstacles caused our sorrow and pain because they delayed the encounter with Ramón. According to the authorities of the prisons in the US, the visits are considered privileges and for that reason, they can be blocked by any reason. Visits are not a right.

We are allowed just an embrace and a kiss to say hello and goodbye. The only moments we can have a physical contact with Ramón are when we are able to take pictures. No other personal contacts are allowed.

We cannot bring anything with us to the visits except for some money to buy fast food in the vending machines.

During the Obama administration, we should clarify that there have been fewer delays on the visa processes and we have been able to visit Ramón at least twice a year.

My husband and his four brothers are unjustly in prison. They are anti-terrorist fighters and they are considered heroes not only by the Cuban people but also by many people around the world. They should be free because they did not cause any harm to the American people or to the American national security. They saved lives in Cuba, in the US, they are political prisoners, and only international solidarity can free them.

My husband and his brothers have been in prison for more than 15 years now.  
Justice has not been served at any level of the justice system.

We need the support of people of good will around the world to understand the truth  
in this case and to support the cause for their freedom.