

Puerto Rican activist Oscar López Rivera deserves freedom after 34 years

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His name is Oscar López Rivera, a 72-year-old Puerto Rican who on May 29 marked 34 years in U.S. federal prisons, 13 of them in solitary confinement. His crime? Fighting for independence for his homeland.

A growing number of people of every political persuasion and many different nationalities believe it is high time for him to be freed — and are actively seeking his release.

On May 30, López Rivera's only daughter, Clarisa López Ramos, 44, joined thousands of New Yorkers who, under the banner "One voice for Oscar," marched through the streets of Harlem demanding his release.

"Oscar long ago paid his debt to society. He is not a terrorist and he didn't harm anyone. After 34 years, it is long past the time to release Oscar and allow him to return to his home, his family and community," said Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.), who addressed the marchers.

Rep. José Serrano (D-N.Y.), City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito, and state Sen. Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan) also raised their voices to ask for López Rivera's freedom.

A Vietnam veteran who earned a Bronze Star for his bravery, López Rivera lived most of his life in Chicago, where he was a housing activist and established the first Latino cultural center.

He was not accused of harming any person, only of "seditious conspiracy" — the same shapeless and gelatinous charge foisted on Nelson Mandela — related to his connection to FALN, a Puerto Rican nationalist group. He was not charged with participating in any of the bombings attributed to the FALN in the 1970s and 1980s.

"Oscar López is an obvious example of a political prisoner in the United States. If the President wanted to pardon him today, he can do it," said López Rivera's attorney, Jan Susler, in a recent interview with CNN. "He has been punished for his bravery. He's serving a 70-year sentence but he never killed anybody. There is no blood on his hands."

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Yes, hard as it may be to believe, one of the oldest political prisoners in the world is not in China, Russia, Syria, Iran or Venezuela, but in a prison in Indiana, an injustice that President Obama can begin to right by freeing him.

Puerto Ricans of all ideologies, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, world leaders, who include five Nobel laureates, and even the governor of Puerto Rico have asked Obama to grant clemency to López Rivera.