

Calls to free jailed Puerto Rican nationalist Oscar López Rivera getting louder in NY

Escrito por Julie Schwieter Collazo / Fox News Latino
Miércoles, 24 de Junio de 2015 09:45



As a United Nations committee held hearings on the status of Puerto Rico in Manhattan, N.Y., outside a group of protesters rallied Monday in support of Oscar López Rivera, a Puerto Rican nationalist whose imprisonment for 34 years now is getting increasing attention.

López, 72, is serving time in Indiana on charges of “seditious conspiracy” for his alleged collaboration with the Armed Forces of National Liberation, or FALN, an organization that sought the island’s independence from the United States back in the 70s.

“We believe that the reason why the U.S. government has kept Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera incarcerated (...) is because the U.S. government wants to maintain Puerto Rico as its colony forever,” say his supporters from Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonización de Puerto Rico (“Brothers United for the Decolonization of Puerto Rico”) on their website.

A week ago, at the New York Puerto Rican Day Parade, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who was born in Puerto Rico, was one of a number of politicians wearing T-shirts

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or carrying posters calling for López's release.

Thanks largely to Mark-Viverito's efforts, the City Council approved a measure on June 10 asking President Barack Obama to grant López clemency. It passed 51 to 8.

"Oscar López Rivera is a 72-year-old Vietnam veteran [who] has been imprisoned ... because of his political beliefs. He was never convicted of harming or killing anyone," Mark-Viverito recently told Latin Correspondent.

"The plea for his release enjoys support from leaders across the political spectrum," she added, "because, even if they disagree on his ideals, they recognize that he was fighting for what he believes."

For Puerto Ricans who support independence from the United States, López has never been entirely forgotten. René Pérez, of the popular Puerto Rican music group Calle 13, and pop star Ricky Martin are among celebrities who have drawn attention to López's situation in the past.

Other Latin American leaders, cultural and political, have been making public statements about López in recent months too. Puerto Rican governors past and present, as well as its Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierlusi, have united across party lines to call for López's release.

Perhaps more interesting was the offer of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, who intimated that he would approve the release of opposition leader Leopoldo López (no relation to Oscar) if President Barack Obama freed the Puerto Rican.

"Man for man," Maduro said, specifying the terms of the deal.

Obama has not commented on Maduro's offer, nor has he issued any statement about possible clemency.

Some political analysts and observers have suggested that Obama's release of López might have a positive impact on the Democratic Party's candidate in the 2016 election — that would be the reason behind the stepped-up protests on the U.S. mainland, especially in New York.

In 1999 President Bill Clinton offered clemency to López and 13 other members of FALN, but he rejected it because it was contingent upon his renouncing terrorism to achieve their aim of independence for the Caribbean commonwealth.

López said that accepting the offer would be admitting that he was a terrorist, which he says he is not. Advocates are hoping President Obama offers a new – unconditional – clemency before the end of his term.

López's sentence expires in 2023.

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