

## From Puerto Rico: what Barack Obama didn't say

By Ramon Frontera Nievas, January 14, 2016

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*Translator's Note:* This brief commentary appears because of its message but also in recognition of the author's solidarity with the Cuban Five political prisoners. In dramatic fashion, Ramon Frontera Nievas has linked their struggle with that of Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar Lopez Rivera, who has served 34 years in U. S. prisons. Here we present Nievas' recent article and, following that, more of his story.

The traditional State of the Union message that U. S. President Barack H. Obama delivered before the Congress on January 12, 2015, has led to many interpretations. The various topics he presented in his speech have been discussed. Praise and criticism have emerged from U. S. Americans and inhabitants of other countries. For Puerto Ricans, there's a question mark about three items that are of great importance for them, and that the President passed over. Puerto Ricans ask themselves why in this, his last message to Congress, he didn't offer them a discussion and why he didn't present alternatives and solutions.

Puerto Rico's colonial status, the financial crisis, and the imprisonment for more than 34 years of the patriot Oscar López Rivera: these are the themes Puerto Ricans were expecting to hear about as they were sitting in front of their televisions watching the President address congresspersons. Once more they feel themselves let down by yet another president. That worn-out phrase used to end most presidential messages "Thank you, God bless you and God bless the United States of America" was the final curtain on Puerto Rican hopes. Another president leaves the White House and doesn't solve the century-old colonial problem.

Day by day the grave financial problem of the Puerto Rican government grows more acute. The government finds itself insolvent, but U. S. laws (which are in force in the island) do not allow a bankruptcy plan to be accepted that would restructure its enormous debt. Puerto Rico is obliged to pay on its debt before providing health services, public security, and education to the people. Puerto Rican Governor Alejandro García Padilla has already announced that if the economic insolvency continues, a real threat exists of a partial closing down of the government.

Oscar López Rivera, 73 years old, is a patriot incarcerated unjustly for fighting for Puerto Rico's independence. He has remained in U. S. prisons for more than 34 years. His first years of incarceration were in the now "sadly famous" hole, where he had no physical contact with his family members when they went to visit. Various United Nations resolutions, five Nobel Prize recipients, multiple parliaments in different parts of the world, and thousands of human rights and solidarity organization have demanded Oscar's immediate freedom.

These three themes, willfully ignored by President Barack H. Obama, require an immediate and just solution. The three themes are related to Puerto Rico's infamous colonial situation. The Puerto Rican people hope that this year, the last of his four-year term and before he leaves the White House, the President will make good on his promises to look for a final solution for the status of the Caribbean island.

The United States cannot be going around the world proclaiming its respect for human rights when it maintains a colony and has political prisoners on its own soil, especially ones who are imprisoned because of anti-colonial struggle. That's the case with Oscar López Rivera.

*Translated by Tom Whitney*

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### Ramon Frontera Nievas and solidarity with Cuba

By Tom Whitney

The Cuban Five political prisoners were arrested in Miami on September 12, 1998. There they had been monitoring preparations for terror attacks on Cuba. For their heroic actions and risk, they then had to endure a flawed trial and long sentences in U.S. prisons. Following a worldwide movement for their freedom, and after two had completed 13 and 14 year sentences, the last three of the Five were released and returned to Cuba on December 17, 2014.

Following ceremonies in Santiago on July 26, 2015, commemorating the 1953 attack on the city's Moncada Barracks and the beginning of Cuba's revolution, Gerardo Hernández, Fernando González, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, and René González – the Cuban Five — were hiking to the summit of nearby Pico Turquino, Cuba's highest mountain. They did so, Frontera Nievas writes, "in fulfillment of a promise they made in the prison in Miami before their trial began."

"My son Malcom Ernesto Frontera and I had the honor of being invited to accompany them," he adds. At the summit "Ramón Labañino initiated observances as the Five "paid homage to Martí and thanked all the

people of Cuba, the leaders of the revolution, and all the worldwide solidarity movement that worked for their return.”

As the small group ascended the mountain, “The Five told me that once we are ‘there with your feet on the ground, where you touch the clouds with your hands’ we have to demand freedom for Oscar López Rivera. [So] at the summit of Turquino with our faces to the sun next to the historic bust of Martí we — the Five and two Puerto Ricans — called for Oscar’s return, shouting out at full volume.”

(Frontera Nieves’ report on the expedition and a few photos may be seen at: <https://brigadajuanriusrivera.wordpress.com/desde-el-turquino-los-cinco-exigen-liberacion-de-oscar-lopez-rivera/>)

On December 15, 2015, two days prior to the one-year anniversary of all of the Five having finally returned, they were at the Alba Cultural House in Havana. Joining them were Ramon Frontera Nieves along with Cubans and others who led in the fight for their freedom. The occasion was the opening of an exhibition of photos Frontera had taken on July 26.

According to Liset García, reporting for Cuba’s Bohemia magazine, “Gerardo expressed appreciation to the Puerto Rican artist for his support and solidarity during years that they were prisoners, and affirmed that someday they will be celebrating together the independence of his nation and freedom for Oscar López Rivera ... Ramón and Fernando emphasized that the showing [of photos] is barely a minimum expression of the effort the Puerto Rican friend has made on behalf of Cuba and the battle for freedom for the Five. They emphasized his tireless sending of correspondence and varied materials to the prisons where they were, and his efforts on behalf of fellow Puerto Ricans in prison, which is a noble cause.”

Having ascended 6,476 foot-high Pico Turquino six times, Frontera Nieves has assembled a collection of photo images of the mountain’s flora, fauna, and landscape. They’ve been on display elsewhere in Havana, and may be viewed [here](#).

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## Desde Puerto Rico: lo que no dijo Barack Obama

Por Ramon Frontera Nieves, Publicado el 1/14/16 •

En el tradicional mensaje del Estado que ofreció el presidente de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, Barack H. Obama, ante el congreso, el pasado martes 12 de enero de 2016, muchos son los análisis que se han realizado. Se discuten los diferentes temas presentados por él, en su discurso. Aplausos y críticas han surgido entre los estadounidenses y los habitantes del resto de los países. Para los puertorriqueños, surge la interrogante sobre tres temas de gran importancia para ellos, e ignorados por el Presidente. Se preguntan los boricuas por qué en su último mensaje ante el Congreso no los presentó a la discusión y por qué no ofreció alternativas y soluciones a los mismos.

El estado colonial de Puerto Rico, la crisis financiera y la encarcelación por más de 34 años del Patriota Oscar López Rivera. Son los temas que los puertorriqueños esperaban oír, cuando estuvieron sentados frente a su televisor viendo al presidente dirigirse a los congresistas. Nuevamente se sintieron desilusionados con otro presidente. La trillada frase utilizada al finalizar la mayoría de los mensajes presidenciales; “Gracias, que Dios los bendiga y que Dios bendiga a Estados Unidos de América”, fue el telón final a las esperanzas de los puertorriqueños. Otro presidente deja la Casa Blanca y no soluciona el centenario problema colonial.

Día a día se agudiza el grave problema financiero del gobierno puertorriqueño. El gobierno se encuentra en bancarrota, pero las leyes estadounidense (que rigen en la Isla), no le permiten acogerse a un plan de quiebra para reestructurar su enorme deuda. Puerto Rico está obligado a pagar su deuda antes de ofrecer los servicios de salud, seguridad y educación al Pueblo. Alejandro García Padilla, gobernador de Puerto Rico, ya ha anunciado que si continúa la insolvencia económica, existe una amenaza real de un cierre parcial del gobierno.

Oscar López Rivera, de 73 años, es un patriota encarcelado injustamente por luchar por la independencia de Puerto Rico. Son más de 34 años que se encuentra en prisiones estadounidense. Sus primeros años de encarcelamiento, fueron en el ya “tétricamente famoso” hoyo, donde no tenía contacto físico con sus familiares cuando lo iban a visitar. Varias resoluciones de las Naciones Unidas, cinco premios de Nobel de la Paz, múltiples Parlamentos de diferentes partes del Mundo y miles de organizaciones de derechos humanos y de solidaridad, reclaman la inmediata liberación de Oscar.

Estos tres temas, voluntariamente ignorados por el presidente Barack H. Obama, requieren su inmediata y justa solución. Los tres temas están interrelacionados con la oprobiosa situación colonial de Puerto Rico. El Pueblo Puertorriqueño, espera que en éste, su último año del cuatrienio y antes de abandonar la Casa Blanca, el presidente cumpla con sus promesas de buscar una solución final al estatus de la Isla Caribeña.

Estados Unidos no puede estar pregonando por el mundo un reclamo de respeto a derechos humanos cuando mantiene una colonia y tiene en su propio suelo prisioneros políticos, encarcelados como resultado de su lucha anticolonial como es el caso Oscar López Rivera.