

## RIGHTS-CUBA: Victims Demand Extradition of Self-Professed Terrorist

By Dalia Acosta  
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HAVANA, Nov 23 (IPS) - The families of the victims of several attacks against Cuba are hoping for what they call "an act of justice" -- the extradition of Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles, wanted by Havana in connection with several crimes, and arrested last Friday in Panama for an alleged plot to kill Fidel Castro.

"Posada Carriles should be tried in Cuba, where so much grief has accumulated because of him," said Olvaldo Pelaez, the brother of Milagros Pelaez, one of the victims of the October 1976 bombing of a Cubana de Aviación airplane that exploded as it took off from an airport in Barbados.

A total of 73 people, including all of the members of Cuba's junior fencing team, were killed in the airplane bombing, recalled here as one of the most sorrowful moments of the past 40 years. Posada Carriles, now 72, is accused of carrying out the bombing.

Posada Carriles proudly admitted to his actions against Cuba in 1998, in an interview with the New York Times.

If he is extradited, Posada Carriles could face the death penalty on terrorism charges. Cuba has 60 days to present evidence to authorities in Panama.

Panama's Technical Judicial Police reported Wednesday that Posada Carriles and three other Cubans arrested with him -- Pedro Remón, Manuel Díaz and Guillermo Nomo -- would remain in custody until the extradition request from Havana ran its course.

The four were arrested in Panama Friday, accused of planning an attempt on Castro's life.

Panamanian authorities heard of the assassination plan from Castro himself, shortly after the Cuban leader flew to Panama to take part in the 10th Ibero-American Summit held there Nov 17-18.

Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso confirmed Wednesday that an individual who had driven Posada Carriles and his group "in a car discovered a briefcase they had left behind that was full of explosives."

Local newspapers reported that the Judicial Technical Police had found eight kgs of C-4 plastic explosives and seven capsules of Semtex near the international airport of Tocumen, in Panama City.

Another 20 kgs of C-4 explosives were found, along with a map of the University of Panama, in whose auditorium Castro gave a conference to thousands of students last Saturday, according to Granma, the official publication of Cuba's ruling Communist Party.

The terrorists "knew that with this kind of explosive, they would not only kill Castro, but all of the people present as well," pointed out Panamanian lawmaker Miguel Bush of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).

Posada Carriles entered Panama on Nov 5 with a Salvadoran passport in the name of Franco Rodriguez Mena. Immigration stamps in the passport, which he was carrying at the time of his arrest, record 59 trips to countries in Central America, Mexico and the United States.

El Salvador's Deputy Minister of the Interior, Gabriel Carranza, said Posada first obtained a Salvadoran passport

in 1991 under the name Ramón Medina Rodríguez, and in 1995 and 1998 acquired passports under the last names Rodríguez Mena.

A bitter enemy of Castro, Posada Carriles took part in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 staged by Cuban exiles living in the United States. He has been sought by Cuban intelligence agents since he escaped from a Venezuelan prison dressed as a priest in 1985.

Posada Carriles was serving a 27-year sentence in connection with the hijacking and bombing of the Cubana de Aviación airplane. The Cuban government said he escaped with the assistance of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and prison authorities.

Cuba has submitted a formal request for the extradition of Posada Carriles. Venezuela is also studying the possibility of seeking his extradition, although Venezuelan Foreign Minister

José Vicente Rangel said Cuba's request would take precedence given the fact that the individual involved was of Cuban origin, and was wanted for crimes committed in Cuba.

All week long, Cuba's state TV has been airing images of the funeral for the victims of the Cubana de Aviación airplane bombing, and the family's demands that the man who planned the attack be brought to justice.

The extradition was also requested by Alexandra Galallena, who accuses Posada Carriles for the Aug 9, 1976 kidnapping and murder of her brother Crecencio Galallena, who was working as a guard at the Cuban Embassy in Argentina at the time.

Crecencio and his co-worker Jesús Sejas "are buried in a wall under a building," said Galallena.

Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, meanwhile, said Wednesday that "for the Church it is not a question of being for or against [the extradition]. This is a legal problem that is international in character, which must be resolved according to the laws of the countries involved."

Justino Di Celmo, the 80-year-old father of Italian tourist Fabio Di Celmo, who was killed in 1997 by a bomb placed in the Copacabana hotel in Havana, called for an honest and impartial trial against "one of the murderers" of his son.

"I am calling on Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso not to release him for any reason," Di Celmo told reporters at a news briefing held on the very spot where his son was killed. "I am asking for justice, nothing more than justice."

In his 1998 interview with the New York Times, Posada Carriles openly admitted that he had organised the spate of attacks

against Cuba's tourist industry that claimed Di Celmo's life as well as seriously upsetting the economy due to the blows dealt to its fastest-growing sector.

"That Italian was at the wrong place at the wrong time," he told journalist Ann Louise Bardach at the time.

"There will be exciting news soon," Posada Carriles also promised, while defending the use of violence as the best means to put an end to socialism in Cuba. "Castro will never change.

There are many ways to bring about a revolution, and I have been working on some of them," he added.

(END/IPS/tra-so/da/mj/sw/00)

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