

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security
Hearing: Holding Cuban Leaders Accountable
Wednesday, June 20, 2018
Rayburn House Office Building – Room 2154

Statement by Ana Alejandre Ciereszko

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. Thank you for conducting this hearing today.

My name is Ana Alejandre Ciereszko. My brother Armando Alejandre, a U.S. Marine and Vietnam veteran, was murdered by the Cuban government on February 24, 1996, while on a humanitarian search and rescue mission for Cuban rafters fleeing the island. Armando, Carlos Costa, Mario Manuel de la Pena and Pablo Morales were flying two unarmed civilian aircrafts over the international waters of the Florida Straits when Cuban MiGs shot them down.

I am here representing Armando's widow, daughter, sisters, 96-year-old mother, and many family members. Twenty-two years after the shoot down, we are still searching for justice. We were dealt a very harsh blow when Gerardo Hernandez, convicted of conspiracy to commit murder in the shoot down, was returned to Cuba when President Obama reestablished diplomatic relations. But we will not give up.

What I bring you today is a compilation of evidence that supports the guilt of the many responsible for these murders. This information we believe is enough to bring us a little bit closer to justice in this case and it consists of reports, indictments, transcriptions of communications, audiotapes, etc. It is contained in a flash drive that I am providing to each of you.

Most of this documentation was provided by us to the FBI in 2002. In 2003 the US District Court, Southern District of Florida, issued indictments charging the head of the Cuban Air Force, Ruben Martinez Puente, and the MiG 29 pilots, Lorenzo Alberto Perez-Perez and Francisco Perez-Perez, with Conspiracy to Kill US Nationals, Destruction of Aircraft, and Murder. These indictments marked the end of action by the US government in these murders.

Today we seek additional indictments against many others responsible for the shoot down. First on the list is Raul Castro, who at the time of the shoot down was the chief of the Cuban Armed Forces. Castro no longer enjoys protection as head of state and proof of his complicity in the shoot down includes an audio recording of an interview in Radio Rebelde in which he accepts responsibility for these murders. It also includes testimony that the Cuban Air Force had practiced shooting down small planes days before February 24, 1996.

Various members of the Cuban intelligence and Armed Forces at the time of the shoot down should also be brought to justice. These include: Eduardo Delgado Rodriguez, Brigadier General of the Cuban Directorate of Intelligence; Emilio Palacios, pilot of the MiG 23; Ulises Rosales del Toro, Chief of the FAR, and others. Their names, and the evidence against them, is provided in the documentation you will receive.

We are also looking for the political will on the part of our government to transmit to Interpol the names of the pilots who shot down the aircraft and the general who gave the order, all of whom have pending indictments in US courts. We have requested this repeatedly to all presidential administrations after the shoot down and nothing has happened. We need to make sure that these names are made available to countries that have extradition treaties with the US and that they are apprehended and brought to trial for these murders.

We are also requesting information on the role of Ana Belen Montes in the shoot down. She is currently serving a 25 year sentence in a US correctional facility after having pled guilty to charges of espionage on behalf of the Cuban government. Montes was the top Cuban analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency and advised President Clinton on the response to the shoot down.

We are also pursuing information on Rolando Sarraff Trujillo who was exchanged by President Obama for Alan Gross in December 2014, at the same time that three of the five convicted spies of the Wasp Network were released. Mr. Sarraff was accused by the Cuban government of being an agent of the CIA and served 20 years in a Cuban jail. He has never been made available to the media since the exchange and nothing is known about his whereabouts. We believe he may have information on the shoot down and would like our government to make him available to us.

To summarize - we are seeking indictments, starting with Raul Castro; we are requesting that the names of those already indicted be provided to Interpol, we are pursuing additional information from the testimony of individuals that could help advance our search for the truth. We hope that you, this Committee, understand that this is not a Cuban issue. Two of the murdered men were born in the United States, my brother was an American citizen, a Marine, and Vietnam veteran, and the fourth was a US resident. As Americans, they deserve the justice that is their due.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.