

Push to free convicted Cuban spies reaches D.C.

The Antonio Maceo Brigade and its allies are pushing for the release of five Cubans convicted of spying against the United States.

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WASHINGTON - A quest to see five Cuban men convicted in 2001 of spying on the United States freed from prison made it to the nation's capital Thursday, with advocates arguing the men were in this country to fight terrorism directed at Cuba.

"These five men had come to the [United States] . . . to infiltrate these terrorist right-wing groups that have threatened us in Miami for decades," said Andrés Gómez, of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, at a news conference.

He spoke in advance of a planned protest march Saturday, where supporters of the so-called Cuban Five plan to push for their release -- and for the United States to extradite Luis Posada Carriles, whom they accused of fostering anti-Cuba terrorism.

Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, and Fernando and René Gonzalez were accused of spying on Miami exile groups and U.S. military installations. They were convicted five years ago.

A three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta threw out the convictions in 2005, finding that Miami's anti-Castro political climate and intense media coverage made a fair trial impossible. A full panel of judges later reinstated the convictions.

Supporters for the men argued that the finding was influenced by U.S.-Cuba policy.

Speakers at the news conference included Francisco Letelier, whose father, Orlando, was assassinated 30 years ago Thursday in Washington.

Orlando Letelier was an exiled former Chilean foreign minister and outspoken government critic who was assassinated by agents of Chile's military government.

Francisco Letelier, who lives in Los Angeles, called on the United States to declare Cuban exile militant Posada a terrorist.

"Posada Carriles needs to be questioned extensively," Letelier said.

A federal magistrate ruled earlier this month that Posada should be released from immigration custody because the U.S. attorney general has not classified him as a terrorist.

Posada arrived in the United States in 2005 from Honduras, where he had been hiding since being freed from jail in Panama. He had been convicted in Panama in connection with an alleged plot to kill Fidel Castro in 2000.

The alleged plot was just one of many the CIA-trained Posada was accused of hatching over the years -- all of which he has denied.

José Pertierra, a Washington lawyer who represents Venezuela, which wants to extradite Posada to stand trial for the 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner, said the White House is reluctant to anger the Cuban-American community.

"This has been a charade from Day 1," said Pertierra.