

Honoring the Memory of Mothers and Women like Carmen

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November 2nd will mark the one year anniversary since the death of Carmen Nordelo, mother of Gerardo Hernández, one of the Cuban 5 political prisoners being held in the US for fighting against terrorism.



That morning a year ago, when we learned that Carmen had died without receiving the kiss and the tenderness of her only son we felt a profound pain. We also felt a great sadness for Gerardo who was isolated from the comfort of a love one, something any human being needs at the time of the loss of a mother.

In 1998 just months before the long detention of Gerardo and his four brothers began, his sister died in a tragic accident. Years before his father Gerardo Hernández Martí also died.

The unjust imprisonment of Gerardo, who was only 33 at the time, deeply affected the life of his family and particularly the health of Carmen. Her boy, as she used to call him, was the victim of a colossal injustice and was sentenced without any proof to two life sentences plus 15 years. All the hatred of the terrorist Mafia of Miami and the perversity of a system of justice only in name fell squarely on Gerardo.

For her commitment, along with the mothers of Antonio, Fernando and René, Carmen was awarded the Mariana Grajales order, the highest honor given to a Cuban citizen for heroism. Despite all the blows that she received in her life, Carmen actively participated in the campaign to bring to the world the true plight of her son and his four brothers and to demand their justice and freedom.

"If there is something in me that is noble and good, there is no doubt I inherited it from her" said Gerardo in his book "El Amor y el Humor todo lo pueden". When Carmen was buried Gerardo asked that a ribbon be put around the flowers to be placed on her casket that read "To mamucha, from her little boy".

In May last year, a few months before her death, we visited Carmen at her home. At the time she could no longer speak and was barely able to move her body, but when we spoke to her and told her we were friends of Gerardo a tear came down her face.

During all these years Carmen was only able to see Gerardo a few times thanks to the punitive, restrictive and manipulative way that visas have been granted to the families of the 5 and Carmen's own precarious health. On one of her first visits to see Gerardo after he was sentenced she spoke with a Cuban journalist, "When I first saw him I do not know where I got my strength, but then he told me, "Mami, I am very proud of you". I had to remain strong at that moment because in the conditions he was in if he saw me crying he would worry. In all his letters he would always say to me "Mami, please take care of yourself, the worst that can happen to me here is to find out that something happened to you."*

In April 2002 Carmen was allowed into the US for 10 days and got to visit Gerardo 5 times during that time. "On the last day of the visit when I saw him entering the visiting room in his beige prison uniform I stood up and embraced him with all my strength. When I held his hands on top of the small plastic table that separated us the guards told me that I was prohibited from doing that simple act of affection that a mother naturally shows to her son."

Mother's day was getting closer that year, and when the same journalist asked Carmen what she would tell mothers in the US if she had the opportunity to publish her message in the US media: "First I would greet them for such a beautiful day, as I will do to all the Cuban mothers. And then I would ask them to help us to achieve justice for the 5."

Carmen died without seeing her son and without achieving justice for the Cuban 5. The US corporate media never interviewed her, did not listen to her request and she was never able to deliver her message to US mothers. On November 2, 2009 Gerardo received the worst news of his life absolutely alone, in a maximum security prison, and now a year later he has not been able to bring flowers to the tomb of his mother.

Family members of the Cuban 5 continue to have problems getting regular visas to visit their sons, and husbands in prison. The visas of Adriana and Olga, wives of Gerardo y René have been denied now for more than a decade. Recently Amnesty International denounced this treatment in a letter to US Attorney Eric Holder on October 4, 2010.

The world-wide community asks itself, how much longer are we are going to have to witness such violations to prisoner's rights, the rights of families and human rights in general? Until when do we have to face the double standards of a country that keeps 5 innocent men locked up while sheltering, protecting and financing confessed terrorists such as Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles?.

On the day after Carmen's death Commander Fidel Castro said, "You cannot deceive an entire people all the time. We not only will bring flowers to the tomb of Carmen Nordelo, we will continue the struggle without resting for the freedom of Gerardo, Antonio, Fernando, Ramón and René, unmasking the infinite hypocrisy and cynicism of the Empire, while defending the truth!"

"Only then will we honor the legion of mothers and women like her that in Cuba have sacrificed the best and most precious years of their lives for the Revolution and Socialism"

In memory of Carmen and all Cuban mothers we demand to Obama: End the injustice, Free the Cuban 5 Now!

*Interview to Carmen, May 12, 2002, Juventud Rebelde

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