

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 7, 2011 9:24 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Convicted Cuban spy released from Florida jail (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Friday, October 07, 2011 09:04 AM
To: NEWS-CA; NEWS-WHA; NEWS-Mahogany
Subject: Convicted Cuban spy released from Florida jail (Reuters)

MARIANNA, Fla. (Reuters) - A Cuban spy convicted of infiltrating a Cuban exile organization in Florida was released from a U.S. jail early Friday after serving 13 years of his 15-year-sentence, his lawyer said.

Rene Gonzalez, the first to be freed of the so-called "Cuban Five" jailed espionage agents arrested in 1998, left the Marianna prison in Florida's northwest Panhandle at around 4 a.m. EDT and was reunited with his two daughters, father and brother, attorney Philip Horowitz told Reuters.

Holding dual U.S.-Cuban citizenship, he is still required under his sentence to spend three years of supervised probation in the United States and was taken to an unknown destination Horowitz declined to reveal for security reasons.

"He was in great spirits, very happy to see his family," Horowitz said, adding he would renew an appeal against the requirement Gonzalez spend his probation in the United States.

Cuba's communist government and Gonzalez' family and supporters are demanding he be allowed to immediately return to Cuba. They say his safety in the United States might be at risk from possible reprisals by the Cuban exiles he was spying on.

Cuba hails the five convicted spies as heroes and has waged an international campaign for their release. Havana argues Gonzalez and his fellow agents -- the remaining four are still serving their sentences -- were working undercover in Florida to stop "terrorist" attacks on Cuba by hard-line anti-communist Cuban exiles.

The case of the five has been an irritant to already poisoned U.S.-Cuba ties, which have deteriorated further since the jailing in Cuba of U.S. aid contractor Alan Gross.

Accused by Havana of illegally distributing Internet and satellite communications equipment on the island, Gross was sentenced by a Cuban court in March to 15 years in prison, dimming prospects for any thawing in relations between the two ideologically-opposed neighbors.

During the Miami trial leading to Gonzalez' 2001 conviction, U.S. prosecutors said that as a member of the so-called Cuban espionage "Wasp Network" he infiltrated a Cuban exile flying group, Brothers to the Rescue, two of whose planes were shot down by Cuban fighter jets off Cuba in 1996. Four men in the planes were killed.

Gonzalez, a pilot who had previously served with Cuba's armed forces in Angola, flew to the United States

from Cuba in 1990 in a crop-dusting plane in an apparent defection before it later emerged in 1998 he was a member of Cuban intelligence.

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.