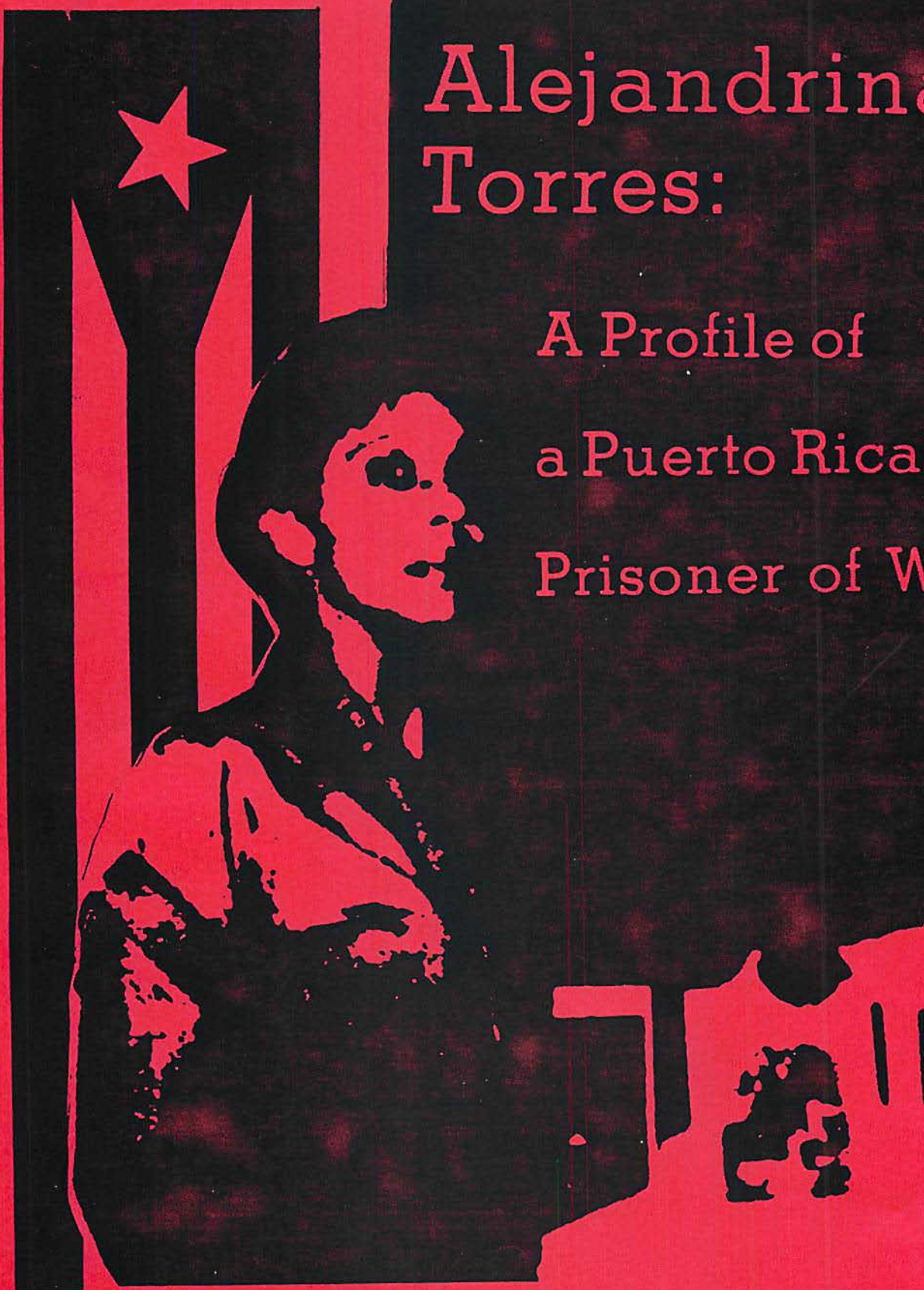


# Alejandrina Torres:

A Profile of  
a Puerto Rican  
Prisoner of War



Liga por los Derechos y la Liberación de los Pueblos  
Capítulo Nacional de Puerto Rico



**LIGA POR LOS DERECHOS Y LA LIBERACION DE LOS PUEBLOS**  
Capítulo Nacional de Puerto Rico

San Juan, Puerto Rico  
September 1, 1987

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Organizations and individuals concerned  
with human rights.

From: Dr. Luis Nieves-Falcón  
President  
The International League for the Rights  
and the Liberation of Peoples  
Puerto Rico Chapter

Re: Violation of human rights of female  
Puerto Rican prisoner Alejandrina Torres:  
an international appeal to the conscience  
of women and men throughout the world.

Ms. Alejandrina Torres is a female Puerto Rican prisoner suffering systematic cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in U.S.A. prisons since 1983. A forty eight year old mother of five children and wife of a Protestant Minister, Ms. Torres was arrested and accused of being a member of a clandestine organization fighting to liberate Puerto Rico from United States' colonial control. United Nations Resolutions 2621 (1970) and 3103 (1973) support Ms. Torres claim of Prisoner of War status and guaranteed basic rights as an imprisoned colonial freedom fighter. However, Alejandrina Torres has been subjected to unprecedented barbaric violation of the most basic human rights by her U.S.A. captors, who deny the application of the above cited U.N. resolutions to her case.

Presently, in the Women's High Security Control Unit at Kentucky, an underground sensory deprivation chamber specially designed for political prisoners, Ms. Torres suffers from heart problems and limited use of her right arm due to abusive treatment over the past five years. The conditions of isolation, 24 hour surveillance and rectal and vaginal probes not applicable to other prisoners are in violation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Attempts to break Ms. Torres spirit of struggle and dedication to the cause of national liberation for Puerto Rico have failed. Although physically weakened, Alejandrina Torres stated recently to her lawyer: "I will resist all their attacks...with the dignity of my nation and my sense of revolutionary morality."

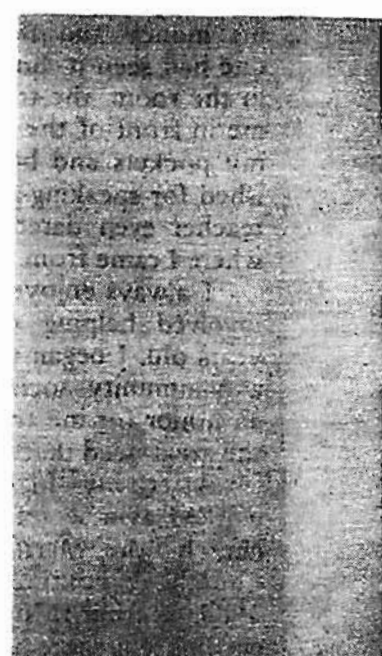
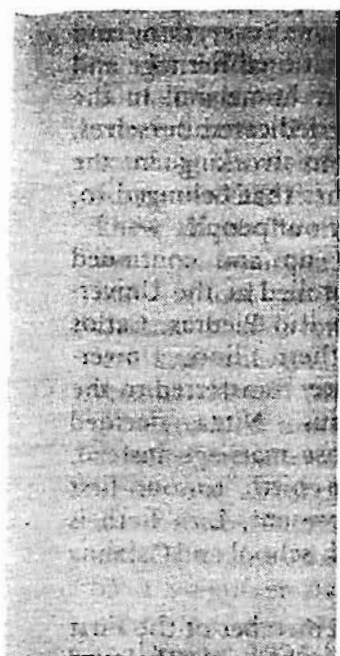
Enclosed herewith are documents attesting the present condition of Ms. Torres. Her only crime has been to defend Puerto Rico's right to freedom and self-determination. Solidarity with Alejandrina Torres means support for the ideals of universal human rights regardless of political or ideological creed. Letters on behalf of Alejandrina Torres, to put an end to her cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, should be sent to the following U.S.A. officials:

Mr. Michael Quinlan  
Director  
Federal Prison System  
320 1st. St. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20534  
U.S.A.

Warden Dubois  
F.C.I. Lexington  
Lexington, Kentucky 40511  
U.S.A.

Congressman Robert Kastenmeier  
2137 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
U.S.A.

Support Ms. Alejandrina Torres and help end U.S. brutality on this Puerto Rican woman for her total commitment to freedom.



## ALEJANDRINA TORRES

**"...a people who struggle and will continue to struggle for independence and justice, eradicating the yankees from our soil once and for all."**

I was born in the community of Florida in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico on July 18, 1939, the ninth child in a family of ten. My father died a year after my birth, causing my mother to work outside the home to provide for us. I was aware of our situation at a very early age, although I could not identify the source of our problems. My mother worked in a tobacco factory and I remember seeing her come home from work sick and tired. My mother's illness worsened and she was hospitalized for a year. My older sister had to leave school to take care of us. Although the memories of going to bed hungry are still fresh in my mind, we

never lacked motherly love and affection. This precarious situation and my mother's failing health forced us to emigrate to the United States.

I was only eleven years old when we moved to New York in 1950. My oldest sister already lived there and my two brothers were migrant workers in Illinois. I was demoted for one year when I entered public school, supposedly because I had never studied in the U.S. and spoke little English, although I learned to speak English during my first month at school. It was then that I became aware of the racial discrimination that our children are subjected



to daily in the American educational system. I still remember a very bitter experience that occurred during my first school year. One of my classmates lost his money and the teacher asked if anyone had seen it. Since I was the only Latina in the room, the teacher immediately called me in front of the class and began searching my pockets and bookbag. I was often punished for speaking Spanish in school and the teacher even dared to tell me to go back where I came from.

I always enjoyed any type of work that involved helping others. When I was 14 years old, I began to work as a volunteer in a community social service agency. It was an honor for me to do this work because of the great need that existed.

After my high school graduation, I worked as a secretary in my neighborhood church, the Martha Memorial Evangelical Church. I continued working there until 1963. During this time I tried to enroll in evening college courses but discovered that I had not taken the required courses. In other words, because I was Puerto Rican the high school had prepared me to work but not to continue my studies. However, I enrolled in a Junior College and took the courses that I needed. It was then that I decided to move to Chicago with my sister.

Once in Chicago, I began working for the Illinois Department of Public Aid, in the Cuban Refugee Unit. I saw how the U.S. government discriminated against the Puerto Rican people and how they perfected the reactionary tendencies of the counter revolutionary groups that they very selectively allowed into their country. I became aware of the discrimination and injustices committed against the Puerto Rican and Black people in comparison to the benefits that these anti-Castro Cuban emigres received.

In 1964, I married the Rev. José Albel Torres, my faithful compañero and mentor. He gave meaning to many of my preoccupations with his knowledge of history and his great love of social justice - an essential factor that we both share.

We struggled and shared this commitment with our children. Norma, who was 13 years old, Carlos Alberto 12 and Nitza 11, (from his first marriage) and later with our

daughters Liza Beth and Catalina, who were born in 1966 and 1972, respectively. Our married life and the experiences that we shared were a unique experience in which we all learned much, shared everything and were enriched by our national heritage and our right to defend our homeland. In the years that followed we dedicated ourselves, as a family nucleus, to working in the community for the rights that belonged to, but were not enjoyed by our people.

Our children grew up and continued their studies. Norma enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras, Carlos Alberto studied at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale and later transferred to the Chicago Circle Campus. Nitza decided against college and chose marriage instead. A year later, she gave birth to our first grandchild, María. At present, Liza Beth is in her senior year of high school and Catalina is in the fifth grade.

In 1965, I became a member of the First Congregational Church where my beloved husband serves as pastor. Through the church our family continued its commitment to our community by struggling for quality education in the neighboring schools and providing social services to help alleviate the poor economic conditions of our people.

From 1972-1973, I worked as a counselor at ASSPA (Association of Spanish



Speaking People of America), an organization that sponsored seminars on leadership development and served as a resource and referral center in the areas of housing, education and employment.

In 1973, I had the honor of being a founding member of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. This Center is dedicated to teaching the richness of our culture and history, one that many have forgotten or never knew about. To this day the Center provides the community with a child care center, a high school program, and adult evening classes, in addition to a showcase of historical artifacts, arts and crafts and a 10,000 volume library. My support for this Center grew from an understanding for the need to develop an alternative educational system where our children can learn and feel good about themselves and others. I taught Typing and General Business courses at the Center on a volunteer basis. I also served as treasurer for a brief period in 1975.

During 1975-1978, I worked with the First Congregational Church. We initiated a community research project to identify the immediate needs of our people, create programs to fulfill those needs, and identify resources already in existence. As a result of the study, we organized GED and English classes, a tutoring program for children, ballet and folkloric dance classes, a summer youth employment program, a food pantry and various seminars on community issues. In 1977, our church group and other dedicated community people founded the Betances Free Clinic. The Clinic provided free medical services to needy people who otherwise would not have had access to quality medical care. Many years after its closing (due to a lack of volunteer doctors) the benefits provided by this Clinic can still be seen and appreciated. Many of the Clinic's former patients now receive treatment at the People's Clinic, which provides high quality dental care for children of all ages.

During 1979-1981, I again had the privilege of working at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, this time as a counselor. I worked closely with students and their families, counseling them concerning vocational and educational opportunities and sensitive family matters such as alcoholism, drug

abuse, premature pregnancies, child abuse, etc.

I began working as an executive secretary in the Department of Child Psychology at the University of Illinois Medical Center in 1982. I continued working there until my arrest on June 29, 1983, when I was brutally yanked from my office by federal agents and accused of "seditious conspiracy" for the sole crime of loving my homeland and my people, a people who struggle and will continue to struggle for independence and justice, eradicating the yankees from our soil once and for all.







Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury:

As I stand before you for the last time, let me once again reiterate that I am doing so as a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, captured in the course of struggle for the liberation of my country — and also as a woman, a representative of the most victimized and oppressed sector of society. These two factors are an integral part of my reality and life experiences. The government has presented much "evidence" during this trial. Their goal is not to help you determine whether we are guilty or innocent.

The government's main goal is to provoke a psychological effect on you — the Jury — and the public at large. Their aim is to make you believe that I am a terrorist — a threat to you — and through me to label the entire Puerto Rican independence struggle terrorist and criminal. Even before this trial began the US government tried to create the illusion that we are a danger to you by ordering the extreme and unprecedented "security" measures which Judge Leighton approved for this trial. The real purpose for the security measures was not because of a threat from us, our community or North American supporters. The purpose was to intimidate supporters so they wouldn't come to the trial, and to implant in peoples' minds, well, if Judge Leighton and the US government required so much security — then they must be dangerous. However, we know from the large attendance at our trial that the US government has not intimidated us.

Throughout the trial, unnecessary evidence was introduced. For instance, did you really need to see the film showing the dynamite being exploded to understand what dynamite is? Did you really need to see a lightbulb flash to simulate the effects of an incendiary device? Was it really necessary for the US attorney to play the tapes over and over again and to show you the weapons and reassure you that they weren't loaded? All of this evidence was not to help you determine our guilt or innocence, which I again state you cannot do. No, it was to keep up the flow of media sensationalism, to make you and the public think we are terrorists and a threat to you.

In Mr. Hartzler's opening statement for the government, he stated that he was going to prove that since 1974, the FALN has conspired to use force and violence to oppose the authority of the US government. There has been a conspiracy since July 25, 1898 the day the US invaded and militarily occupied my country. But that conspiracy is not to overthrow the authority of the US government — it is to win the independence of my nation. I am proud to be a part of that conspiracy — and I will continue to struggle to free my nation — whether it be in your yankee prisons or in the streets. Whose authority are we accused of attempting to overthrow? It is the authority of Britain over the 13 colonies, India and Ireland. It is the authority of Nazi Germany over France. It is the authority of Portugal over Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and

the Cape Verde Islands. It is the authority of colonialism. We will never submit to that authority!

The evidence attempts to show you that Edwin Cortés, Alberto Rodríguez and myself attempted to plan bombings at military bases, that we attempted to free our comrade Oscar López Rivera and that we wanted to free all our comrades, Puerto Rican prisoners of war held illegally in US jails. I am proud to say that I did try to do this. But I am not a terrorist. *Terrorism* is defined in Webster's Dictionary as an act of violence and terror to achieve a political end. How does this government which permits the mayor of Philadelphia to bomb 62 black people's homes, randomly murder 16 black men, women and children, orders the ecological destruction of my nation to suit its industrial and military purposes — have the moral audacity to call me a terrorist? Our war of liberation is not against the American people. We could attack the populace if we so desired. But, we don't want to terrorize you. That is why actions are carried out in the dead of night as Mr. Ferguson stated in his closing statement, to attack military bases. We don't want to hurt anyone. However, we do want the US to get out of Puerto Rico. And we know that a country which drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which finances terrorism and supports the contras who are trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government by destroying child care centers, schools and entire villages —

*...to all our sisters yet to be born who will struggle  
and die for women's liberation.*



Revolutionary greetings to all gathered here on International Women's Day—this day of great significance to us and for women all over the world. I want to greet everyone, but especially the women for their level of commitment, hard work and spirit, so necessary to bringing about the total liberation of women.

I salute all the people gathered here who have dedicated so much effort to making this demonstration successful, to those who protest the inhuman conditions of women interned in this newly constructed control unit. The fact that this is the first and only one of its kind in the US for women political prisoners makes it imperative that we protest it right now. Only in this way will we expose the contradictions and secrecy surrounding the reasons for its existence.

More importantly is the date chosen for this demonstration—International Women's Day—a day of great significance for us and for women all over the world. The fact that you chose this day reflects your commitment to oppose the violation of human rights and your level of respect and solidarity for women of resistance in whose honor International Women's Day was proclaimed.

Women whose resistance is characterized by their sensitivity, commitment and determination and who have served to inspire and empower women all over the world. Rightfully so, for their examples of sensitivity have taught us that the struggle for our human rights has to be all encompassing and not based on class differences. The example of women's commitment is rooted in the ability to teach and to learn, but most importantly, to carry out our tasks unrelentlessly. The legacy of women's determination inspires and compels us to realize our aspirations at whatever level we're capable and willing to act and by whatever means our conscience dictates.

We cannot demand rights for which we are not willing to struggle. When I think of International Women's Day, I think of Harriet Tubman, Lucy Parsons, Haydeé Santamaria, who fought in the Cuban Revolution, Native American women like Anna Mae Aguash, Dora María Tellez of the Nicaraguan Revolution, Nora Astorga,

Eleanor Bumpers, a Black woman shot in cold blood by New York City policemen, and Doña Consuelo Lee de Corretjer, Doña Isabel Rosado, Lucy and Alicia Rodríguez, Carmen Valentín, Haydeé Torres, Dylcia Pagan—women who have sacrificed everything for the liberation of our beloved Puerto Rico, Assata Shakur, Lolita Lebron, Winnie Mandela, the Plowshare and Sanctuary women, like Lorry Thomas, here with us today, and all the unknown women, past and present who have struggled and died and for all our sisters yet to be born who will struggle and die for women's liberation.

I would like to end with a paraphrase from a beautiful poem written by a dear comrade—Juan Antonio Corretjer: . . . *Glory to those Black, White and Native hands because they worked. Glory to all the hands that work today because they build and from them shall come forth the new liberated woman.*

In that same spirit, on behalf of all our comrades, I salute you.

**Happy International  
Women's Day!  
Build a Revolutionary  
Women's Movement!  
Independence and Socialism  
for Puerto Rico!  
Shut Down Lexington  
Control Unit!  
[No Pasaran!]**



# Alejandrina Torres:

## A Profile of a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War



*I am a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War captured in the course of struggle for the liberation of my country. I am also a woman, a representative of the most victimized and oppressed sector of society.*

*(Alejandrina Torres, addressing the jury at her trial for seditious conspiracy, August 1, 1985.)*

In 1983, Alejandrina Torres, then a 44 year old Puerto Rican woman, mother of five and wife of a protestant minister, was arrested along with three men and accused of being a member of a clandestine army fighting to free Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial domination. They were tried for seditious conspiracy - conspiring to use force against the "lawful" authority of the United States over Puerto Rico. Specifically the government convicted them of planning several things: an expropriation, the escape of a captured comrade, the bombing of U.S. military installations, and the stockpiling of weapons and explosives. From the moment of her arrest, the government visited upon her special punitive conditions which continue to set precedent.

Alejandrina is one of approximately 20 such prisoners currently in U.S. prisons and jails. Like Alejandrina, these men and women share some very unique characteristics. They are not "criminals." They have no criminal records, and, in the eyes of the independence movement and international law, have committed no

crimes. Many are married and with children. Many are college educated. They had occupations - worker, retailer, farmer, artist, pharmacist's assistant, university counselor, secretary, student, etc.

While the United States denies that it has political prisoners, and refuses to officially recognize the Prisoner of War<sup>1</sup> or political prisoner position taken by those in custody,<sup>2</sup> two of whom are pretrial detainees, the remainder of whom are serving sentences of from 35 years to life, its special and punitive treatment of these men and women loudly contradicts the denials and in a multitude of ways falls far short of meeting the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMRPT) beginning with the proscription against discrimination on grounds of political opinion - a basic principle of the rules.

The National Prison Administration has labelled every sentenced political prisoner and POW a "Central Inmate Monitoring Case," meaning that all decisions about them are to be made at the national level,<sup>3</sup> which facilitates national level input, involvement, and even decision-making by other agencies such as the FBI.

Those who design this special treatment play an important role in the government counterinsurgency plan. The POW's, as combatants, set examples for their nation of the highest level of struggle against colonial domination. Yet through its special, brutal



conditions, the government seeks to punish them and make examples of them in such a way as to intimidate others from following in their footsteps.

Emboldened by the virtual abdication of oversight responsibilities on the part of the U.S. Congress and the U.S. courts, prison authorities act with impunity generally,<sup>4</sup> but especially toward the POW's and political prisoners. They also act with creativity and experimentality, testing not only what succeeds in isolating, turning informant, breaking or driving mad these prisoners, but also what the public will tolerate. The arsenal of tactics includes a *denial system* which includes isolation, criminalization, humiliation, denial of medical treatment, physical and sexual assault, continual harassment and vigilance and even assassination. Tactics are highly personalized. The government admits that it commissioned psychological profiles on the pretrial detainees, and it appears to have done the same with the POW's, so as to increase effectiveness. Denial connotes not just denial of human rights but denial of the essence of the persons political being and existence. The very existence of this governmental political campaign to destroy these prisoners violates the guiding principles of the UNSM RTP, which prohibit the aggravation of suffering inherent in imprisonment<sup>5</sup> and prescribe "minimiz(ing) any differences between prison life and life at liberty which tend to lessen the responsibility of the prisoners or the respect due to their dignity as human beings." The rules also mandate that for persons under sentence "(t)he treatment shall be such as will encourage their self respect..."

The denial system as applied to Alejandrina has taken on a special flavor -counterinsurgency with a sexist twist. It seems the government feels a woman POW is weaker and therefore easier to break. Its program for Alejandrina is psychological torture combined with sexual assault. The specifics range from violation of her privacy (placing her in an all male unit and providing no screen to permit the private use of the toilet; aiming a surveillance camera at a curtainless shower; requiring medical care under the watchful eye of male guards) to humiliation and degradation of a sexual nature (requiring excessive strip searches), to actual hands-on sexual assault (male prison employees forcefully strip searching her and feeling her breasts; digitally probing her vaginal and anal cavities). Yet with what success has this campaign to break her met? In June of 1987, Alejandrina posited:

*The more my jailers confine me and try to isolate me, the stronger my spirit of resistance. Their games with our minds will not achieve what they want. If there is one thing I've learned here it is to contain my rage. The contempt I feel for them and all they represent is expressed in my posture. If there is one thing my jailers are conscious of, it is that we represent opposing forces. They continue with their program of control and I intensify my resistance. In spite of this I am still affected by the*

*conditions in which they have me. The effects of isolation and my inability to be creative are most notable. No matter how conscious one is of the situation, there are times when the boredom and inactivity drain me. I have access to books and television (an artifact I hate for what it represents in this basement) but the confinement is highly prohibitive. But of one thing I am clear, is the fear that our enemy has for our struggle to regain our nation. Their vindictiveness with the POW's, and their insistence on making examples of us for the revolutionary movement, reveal their fear. This weakness on their part gives me infinite joy. They will not succeed in their attempts to isolate me and disassociate me from my political beliefs and from our movement.*

### **Pretrial detention - Chicago Metropolitan Correctional Center.**

Following a dramatic arrest at their workplaces, replete with hundreds of police and FBI agents, guns drawn, Alejandrina and her comrades were swept into court where a magistrate set prohibitive bail of \$5 and \$10 million. The government denied them the rights and privileges generally afforded pretrial detainees such as fresh air, exercise, human interaction,<sup>6</sup> family and social visits, and trial preparation. Instead, the government placed all four in the most punitive and isolated prison cells available, assigning Alejandrina, the only woman, to an area of the prison for men. The small glass window near the door of her cell ensured that she had no privacy -not even to use the toilet. Exhibitionist male prisoners housed in the unit seized the opportunity to come to her window and expose their naked genitalia.

The cells were sensory deprivation chambers, with thick solid steel doors, through which permeated no air, light, or sound. The adverse conditions created stress which led to medical problems for Alejandrina -the aggravation of an existing heart condition (mitral valve prolapse) and discovery of a new condition (bundle branch block) - attended by prison officials only when she showed symptoms of a heart attack. Out of apparent fear of the cumulative effect of continuing such stress, authorities moved her to the women's unit, but not first without seeking to guarantee continued isolation. She soon realized officials had warned the other prisoners against associating with the "terrorist." The other women soon realized the sheer folly of the label fixed by the administrators, and embraced Alejandrina, while staff experienced quite the opposite reaction. They seemed to feel she was getting along too well in the new, more open environment, and began to look for ways to create antagonism and to provoke her.

This staff did on July 11, 1984, artificially creating an incident. After a visit with her daughter, Alejandrina complied with a female guard's routine order that she



strip and submit to thorough search. Says Alejandrina, "I complied with the strip search, which comprised removal of all my garments, squatting three times (front and back view, and coughing), spreading legs apart and bending forward for a full visual exposure of both my cavities (rectal and vaginal)." As if this were not enough -particularly in light of the fact that the officer has no suspicion that Alejandrina had secreted any contraband, the guard insisted that she repeat the humiliating procedure. When Alejandrina questioned the necessity of further searching, remarking that it was harassment, the guard summoned a male lieutenant, Lewis, falsely reporting to him that Alejandrina refused to submit to a search. The lieutenant, unbeknownst to Alejandrina, had in mind forcefully consummating the search himself. Alejandrina describes the sexual assault he perpetrated on her:

*Lewis walked inside my cell room, handcuffed me in the back and escorted me to [a small] room... In that small area he placed four female officers (Guidry, Buzzelli, C. Lewis (Lt. Lewis' wife), and Murray), himself and me. Inside that room I immediately questioned his presence there for I knew what was about to happen and I was going to comply with their orders. He didn't answer and ordered me to stand up. I did, and told him that he couldn't do that to me. I couldn't exercise resistance against him because I was trying to avoid having to expose myself in front of him. I had the institutional smock on and nothing else underneath but my briefs. I let out a desperate scream pleading with him not to do that to me. He wouldn't listen and the officers just stood there and said nothing. In my fear and desperation I managed to get free one of my hands which was grabbed tight away by an officer and brutally pushed to floor by him and all the while I kept pleading with him to leave and telling him he couldn't do that to me. I realized I was helpless and the man was insisting on doing it. I then pleaded with the female officers not to let him do that to me, that I would do it. The four female officers just stood there and did not say a word; not even his wife. He was putting pressure on my neck with his legs. I was resting my body on my knees. I felt a blow on my rib cage and he forcefully pushed my face on the floor which caused tremendous pain. I felt my legs being spread being spread forcefully, my panties lowered and the search consummated by his orders and in his presence with total disregard to my continuous pleas.*

The response of the prison staff to this form of rape? First, to throw Alejandrina into an isolation cell, to suffer post rape trauma in sensory deprivation. Second, to turn around and accuse her of being insolent, disruptive and combative, supposedly in violation of prison rules, sentence her to 15 days in disciplinary

segregation and prohibit future family visits. Third, to cite her for "conduct which disrupts the orderly running of the prison" the following morning, when she became upset as she recounted the assault during a meeting with her attorney and co-Defendants and requested to see a doctor. Fourth, to attempt to prejudice the judge presiding over the criminal case by writing a secret letter to him conveying the attacker's false version of the incident. The administration also rebuffed pastoral visits by high officials from Alejandrina's church and state synod.

The resistance demonstrated by Alejandrina and her supporters altered the situation substantially. Over a hundred members of the community demonstrated at the prison to protest the assault. A delegation of civic and religious leaders wrote to and repeatedly sought a meeting with the warden, who refused even to acknowledge their communication. The judge rejected the warden's secret letter, publishing it to all concerned, stating that such *ex parte* contact is inappropriate. The warden's lawyers in the U.S. Attorney's office pressured him to meet with Alejandrina's attorney. And ultimately, the warden suspended the punishment which had been meted out to Alejandrina.

Lt. Lewis and his staff, however, were not to succumb to pressure, and certainly not to common decency. In the weeks following they threatened to repeat their assaultive behavior, and did so on July 23. Lewis, again using excessive force, grabbed Alejandrina by the throat and severely twisted her right arm behind her back. Although this time he did not remain present for the search, a search by another male



was done at his behest in the presence of four female officers who could well have performed a routine search to which Alejandrina agreed to submit -another unprecedented, degrading search wherein the male stuck his hand inside Alejandrina's clothing to feel her breasts and genital area.

This attack by Lewis left more than psychological scars -it left Alejandrina without the use of her right arm. Lewis' violence, combined with the prison's deliberate indifference to the resulting medical problem, in fact permanently injured her, such that three years later she has still not recouped the full range of motion in her arm.

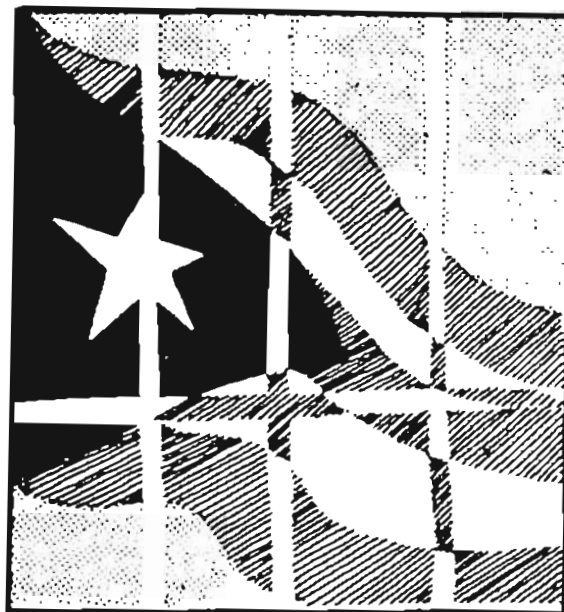
The conduct of Lewis and his cohorts was commended by high prison officials. All those involved were soon promoted, and officials applauded their behavior as "professional." On the other hand, following a thorough investigation of this assaultive behavior by a commission named by its president, the United Church of Christ in the U.S. concluded that the assault occurred just as Alejandrina and her attorneys reported.

Alejandrina and her comrades were held as pretrial detainees for over two years in this prison designed only for short term detention.

### **Tucson, Arizona Metropolitan Correctional Center**

Immediately following their sentencing to prison terms of 35 years each, her co-Defendants Edwin Cortes and Alberto Rodríguez were sent to Lewisburg, PA, to a federal prison where they were placed in the general population to enjoy the rights and privileges regularly afforded those serving sentences. Alejandrina, on the other hand, was not sent to either of the two federal prisons for women. Instead, officials sent her to another pretrial facility, (though she was now a sentenced prisoner) thousands of miles from her family, community and attorneys, to the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in Tucson, AZ. There, officials acted to ensure her continued isolation, placing her in a small enclosed unit of fewer than eight women in a prison with 450 men, offering no programs, no meaningful opportunity to work and no recreational space or equipment and seeking to create divisions between Alejandrina and the other women. They continued their campaign of provocation and harassment, which escalated on the arrival of another political prisoner, Susan Rosenberg, to include a false charge of possession of a weapon -a butter knife placed in their cell by guards purportedly conducting a shakedown (a search for contraband). Staff falsely and arbitrarily invoked disciplinary rules and then meted out excessive punishment, often to punish her for media reports about her or demonstrations in her support. This meant that Alejandrina spent most of her year at Tucson in segregation.

The Tucson program implicated measures calculated to have a psychological effect. A staff psychologist



took a straight forward approach. He stopped Alejandrina one day and suggested that she needed therapy, stating that she must be crazy for having dedicated her life to winning independence for Puerto Rico, because the United States is such a powerful enemy. Administrators took a more subtle approach. They waived the red flag of Lexington in Alejandrina's and Susan's faces. Months in advance of the opening of the Women's Control Unit, officials taunted them with the prospect of transfer, all the while refusing to disclose any information about the Unit. The shroud of secrecy around Lexington was impermeable -prison chiefs refused to provide even Congress with information about the new Unit, and local officials in Lexington expressed concern about the lack of information. Yet, from guards to high officials, prison employees constantly raised to the women the specter of Lexington, hoping thereby to create anxiety and fear.

The campaign of sexual assault, begun in Chicago, continued. First a male officer, under the guise of conducting routine pat down searches, fondled her breasts. Reports of this criminal conduct to his superiors were met with predictable rejection, as they deemed that he acted "professionally" all the while conceding their familiarity with the history of this type of abuse of Alejandrina.

As the new Control Unit at Lexington opened, Tucson officials seized upon their last opportunity to brutalize Alejandrina and political prisoner Susan Rosenberg. Taking pleasure at his responsibility, the warden's executive assistant Gibson told the two women they must submit to "searches" of their vaginal and anal cavities. Never for a moment did this man believe they had secreted anything in their body cavities. Rather, he said, such "searches" are required of all prisoners before they go into a Control Unit, having



learned that the men of the Marion Control Unit have the option to elect an x-ray, Alejandrina asked for this as an alternative. "No," replied Gibson, "we can't get what we want that way." And so, a male prison employee forcefully rammed his finger up their vaginas and rectums as guards restrained Alejandrina and Susan.<sup>7</sup> They were then robbed of all their personal property and promptly sent to Lexington.

### The Womens Control Unit at Lexington, Ky

The Women's Control Unit, a prison within a prison, is the only one of its kind and the first political prison in the United States. This small unit, which is underground, houses only POW Alejandrina Torres and four other women, two of whom are also in prison for political activity against the U.S. Government.<sup>8</sup> It has a capacity to hold 16 women, and is ill-equipped to provide for the needs of the women interned therein. Though it is open for business, the shroud of secrecy continues. Unlike other maximum security prisons, media are prohibited from bringing cameras into the Unit, and the Unit is closed to the public.<sup>9</sup> The special conditions which apply in no other prison in the U.S. embody the "denial system," and include:

- placement of political prisoners and POW's in the Unit solely because of political associations.

- indefinite length of stay in the Unit, with no stated policy of how one earns one's way out, (except possibly renouncing one's political associations). A local newspaper reporter wrote an article before the unit opened stating, "The first of the 16 women could arrive next month. Some will never leave."

- performances of non-consensual vaginal and rectal cavity "searches" conducted by male prison employees prior to placement in the Unit. The prison officials denied them the option of x-rays, an option offered to men taken to the only other federal Control Unit at Marion Federal Prison.

- a policy of no contact visits with family or lawyers which, for the moment, is not enforced as to them.

- no visits whatsoever with people other than immediate family. The prison has held that Alejandrina's grandchildren do not come within its definition of immediate family.

- limited visiting hours.

- an initial restriction on correspondence, limited to 15 people, who must first submit to FBI and prison screening and approval.

- censorship or rejection of all political literature, including feminist and lesbian publications.

- visitors -family and attorneys- will be denied unless they submit to being photographed twice by officials before entering.

- denial of religious services and congregational worship, as well as denial of religious visits from any non-prison employed clergy.

- denial of interaction with any other prisoner.

- denial of participation in normal work and recreation activities.

- sleep deprivation.

- denial of haircuts.

- limited recreation in a small outside yard surrounded by a tall wooden fence to prevent sensory stimulation.

- strip "searches" every time they return from recreation in the outside yard.

- special uniforms purportedly to keep the women "feminine."

- denial of all privacy - guards - twice as many per prisoner as in any other prison - and video cameras are present at all times, including a camera aimed at the shower, which has no curtain or other privacy shield.

- virtually no natural light or ventilation.

- limitation of personal property to 5 books and 10 photographs.

The pretense for the existence of this special unit and the placement of Alejandrina and the others is the government's "particular concern with inmates who may be subject to rescue attempts by outside groups." However, the government makes no claim that any of the women in Lexington have been or are so subject. There is only a gross speculation that some unidentified group may at some unspecified time perform some unspecified "rescue"

The government asserts that placement in the unit is merely a classification and is not for discipline or punishment. Yet the conditions approximate those of disciplinary custody. Neither Alejandrina nor any of the women in the Control Unit has been notified of, tried for, or found guilty of a prison rule violation.

Officials' treatment of the women is as "security cases," and not as human beings, which is also reflected in the delivery of medical care, or lack thereof. It

took prison employees three months to take Alejandrina to a medical unit on the third floor of the same building that houses the Control Unit, for needed eye and heart examination. Four male guards then insisted that the EKG technician perform the test on a chained and shackled Alejandrina, and expected to remain in the room throughout, even though the exam required her to disrobe. The technician, attempting to console her, told her not to worry, that the guards were all married men. The test was ultimately performed without chains and with the guards out of the room, but still able to observe through the door left ajar.

Attempts to undermine the women's psychological stability, in addition to the severe isolation, range from the infantile (guards baying like dogs during normal sleep hours) to the sophisticated (maintaining arbitrariness in daily rules, so that behaviour condoned one day is punished the following day).

The prison chaplain paid the women a visit soon after they arrived to inform them they would be allowed no congregational religious services, in spite of the teachings of their faiths, and offered that he would try to find them a Bible. Control Unit staff have insured that religious observances are banned, refusing to allow Christmas decorations, and prohibiting the women from singing religious songs together. Officials have recently spurned a pastoral visit from Father Daniel Berrigan, and informed a national church body seeking to tour the unit that, unlike even Marion, (the most maximum security prison for men) this prison is "closed to the public".

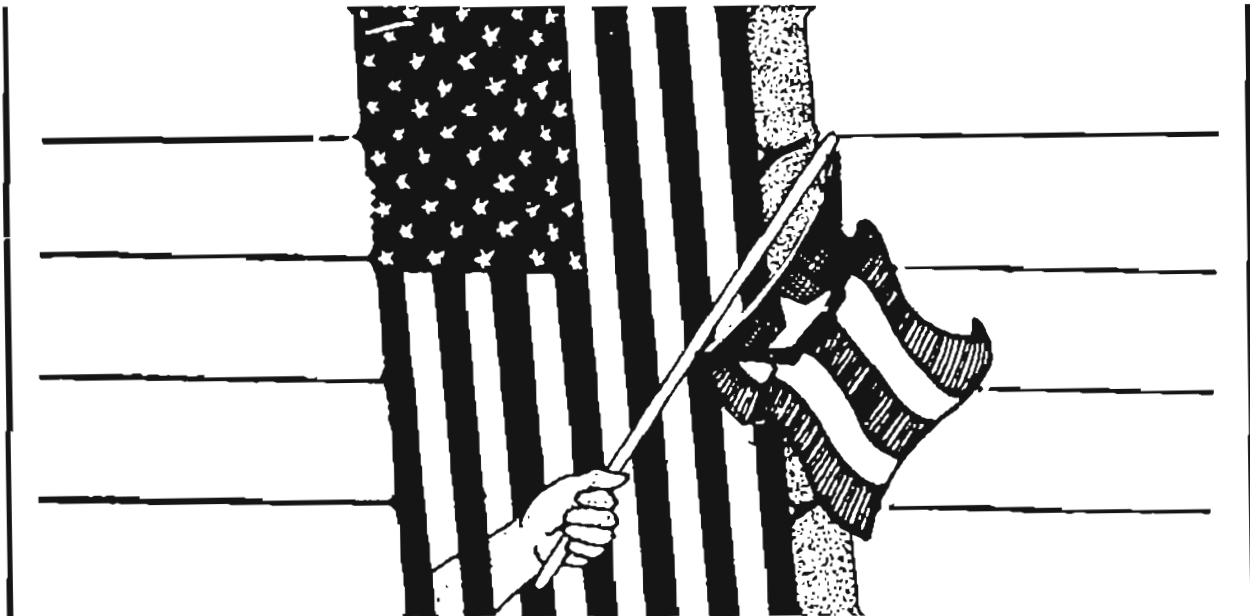
The women have begun to experience some of the

predictable psychopathological effects of long term solitary confinement,<sup>12</sup> including lethargy, inability to concentrate, memory lapses, loss of appetite, and problems with eyesight. In spite of these palpable consequences, and regardless of this endless list of human rights violations, the director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons asserts "I am satisfied that Ms. Torres and Ms. Rosenberg (as well as the other three women) are being confined in a humane and proper manner at the FCI Lexington."

So unusual is this Unit that Amnesty International has determined that the allegations of human rights violations meet its criteria and has therefore sent a letter of inquiry to federal prison officials.

We cannot ignore the fact that the Bureau of Prisons constructed and opened the Women's Control Unit at Lexington during the time Amnesty International was observing the prison which served as the model for Lexington --Marion. Amnesty recently published its report about Marion, which, for the first time in the history of U.S. prisons, finds a massive human rights violations. What is significant, in addition, is that the report addresses not only the abominable conditions of Marion, but speaks to the need for change within the entire Bureau of Prisons:

In a prison setting, as elsewhere, there has to be a balancing of security and freedom. Allowing considerations of freedom to prevail, in every case, over considerations of security creates unnecessary risks.





The Federal Bureau of Prisons is not geared to provide this balancing. It represents only one side of the equation, the security side. The U.S. prison system has nothing on the other side of the equation.

Amnesty therefore recommends:

The U.S.A. should set in place a permanent mechanism for detailed, independent, continuous assessment of prison conditions in the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The government has done nothing to implement this insightful recommendation.

### Conclusion

Alejandrina Torres now sits buried alive in the modern day dungeon known as the Women's Control Unit in Lexington, KY. Though the U.S. government has her body, it does not have her mind. The purpose of the isolation, sensory deprivation, and psychological terror of Lexington is to accomplish that task — to break her spirit and her will. After nine long months of their program, Alejandrina writes with defiance:

I am not incapacitated (though my jailers have certainly tried to make me so). I am not their victim. What I am is a revolutionary whose spirit of resistance they want to destroy because I dare to demand the treatment and the respect that corresponds to my position of Prisoner of War. By my conduct I have assured my captors that when they treat me, they are treating a POW. They would like to destroy this spirit in me, but this they cannot do, for I will resist all their attacks. I know I will continue resisting with the forthrightness of my POW position, the dignity of my nation, and my sense of revolutionary morality.

Jan Susler  
Attorney for Alejandrina Torres

### NOTES:

1. Alejandrina and other 14 prisoners have taken the position that Prisoners of War, based on international law. In the Resolution 2621 (XXV) (1970), the General Assembly specifically directed that anti-colonial freedom fighters are not to be prosecuted as criminals under the domestic law of the detaining colonial power, but instead must be "treated in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War." Resolution 3103 (1973) reaffirms that anti-colonial combatants "are to be accorded the status of prisoners of war" pursuant to the Geneva Convention. The United States ratified the Geneva Convention (6 U.S.T. 3516) in 1955. Furthermore, the Additional Protocols (I & II) to the Geneva Convention (1977), Article 1 paragraph 4,

Article 43 and Article 44 echo the same recognition of POW status to captured combatants in wars of national liberation. With its colonial subjugation, the U.S. created and perpetuates bellicose relations with its island nation neighbor.

2. Edwin Cortés, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jiménez, Oscar López-Rivera, Adolfo Matos, Filiberto Ojeda-Ríos, Dylcia Pagán, Alberto Rodríguez, Alicia Rodríguez, Ida Luz Rodríguez, Luis Rosa Juan Segarra Palmer, Julio Antonio Veras y Delgadillo, Alejandrina Torres, Carlos Alberto Torres, María Haydee Torres, Carmen Valentín, are all in the U.S. prisons and jails. Another, William Guillermo Morales, who escaped from custody while at a hospital, is currently held in a Mexican prison. The U.S. has stated its intention to extradite him, and international support opposes such extradition.

3. Decisions about conditions for social prisoners are routinely made at the institutional level or even at the level of the housing unit within the prison.

4. The U.S. has one of the highest numbers of people incarcerated in the world, with an inordinately disproportionate number of Third World men in its prisons. This warehousing under overcrowded and inhumane conditions is part of a government strategy to control potentially insurgent populations.

5. A recent Venceremos Brigade from the U.S. had the opportunity to visit a women's prison in Cuba, and reports, "We were very impressed with the humane treatment of the women. The warden...said the prison didn't have the right to add any additional punishment beyond that imposed by the court, which was the loss of the prisoners' liberty for a given amount of time. She said the true job of the prison was to prepare people for their life outside by providing them with an education, cultural activities, job skills, and self-esteem."

6. She was arrested with Edwin Cortés, Alberto Rodríguez and José Luis Rodríguez.

7. Not surprisingly, Michael Quinlan, the new chief of federal prisons, personally reviewed the incident and found the assaults neither "punitive nor outside established policy. Further, it appears that every effort was made to ensure that the search was performed in a professional, humane manner..."

8. Susan Rosenberg and Silvia Beraldini are anti-imperialists active in social justice issues.

9. National church leaders who months ago requested a tour have yet to tour the Unit.

10. Duke, J., "High Security Women's Unit at FCI ready for inmates," Lexington Herald Leader, July 17, 1986.

11. Public pressure recently resulted in a change of wall color, now drab institutional beige.

12. See, e.g., Grassian Stuart, *The Psychopathological Effects of Solitary Confinement*, 140 *American Journal of Psychiatry*, pp. 1450-1454 (November, 1983); Amnesty International's *Work on Prison Conditions of Persons Suspected or Convicted of Politically Motivated Crimes in the Federal Republic of Germany: Isolation and Solitary Confinement*, May 1980; Amnesty International's *Current Work on the Federal Republic of Germany*, February 20, 1986.

will only leave Puerto Rico through force.

Judge Leighton has repeatedly stated that this is not a political trial. Nothing could be further from the truth. My actions were not motivated by personal greed or because I have a malevolent nature. I am here because I am fighting for the independence of my nation. As you sit there, you know that this is true, as does the US attorney and Judge Leighton. Recently, an article appeared in the *Chicago Sun Times* entitled "Terrorism is in the Eyes of the Beholder". And that's true. The US government labels me a terrorist because I'm willing to engage in armed struggle to free my nation. Yet, if I were a mercenary who fought with the Contras in Nicaragua President Reagan would call me a freedom fighter. Clearly, the issue is not how I am fighting — but what I am fighting for and who I'm fighting against. Although the evidence clearly shows that Edwin Cortés, Alberto Rodríguez and myself are fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico, you have not been permitted to learn why I would fight for the independence of my nation. Judge Leighton ruled that US authority over Puerto Rico is lawful. It doesn't matter how many atrocities have been committed against my people under that lawful authority. And yet it is "lawful". That is why this trial is a farce.

We have known the outcome of this trial since June 29, 1983. At the hands of our jailers we have already experienced the burden of the sentence that is going to be imposed on us. In 1803, Robert Emmet, an Irish patriot who was hanged because he led an insurrection to free Ireland from English rule stated at his sentencing, and I quote: *Sentence was imposed on me before this trial ever began.* For us, this conviction was just as certain.

In answer to our opening statements, Mr. Hartzler stated we are unlike George Washington because Washington wanted democracy. You get an idea of what the US government means by democracy when you know that George Washington, the supposed democratic hero kept black people as slaves, and women were at best second class citizens. That is not my idea of democracy. So, if he tells you there is a democracy in Puerto Rico, you know something is wrong. But, Mr. Hartzler missed the point. Edwin Cortés was explaining that George Washington was a hero because he won. If you had lost your anti-colonial struggle, Britain could

very well have tried Washington for sedition. Right now we are being tried for sedition. When we win independence, our people will state that this trial was just one more in a history of outrages carried out by your government against the Puerto Rican people.

You heard the testimony of the traitor Alfredo Mendez. He tried to tell you he was sick of his life — so he decided to cooperate with the US government. What he was sick of was the

from a New York prison — using the bandages wrapped around his finger stubs to escape. He rejoined our independence struggle in spite of the great personal risks. A movement that can produce women and men of the caliber of Guillermo Morales can never be defeated by worms like Alfredo Mendez — nor can the US government defeat us even with all its cameras, FBI agents and technology.

Finally, what your government at-

*"... My actions were not motivated by personal greed or because I have a malevolent nature. I am here because I am fighting for the independence of my nation."*

thought of spending 75 years in jail. He is the government's boy — he no longer is a Puerto Rican. You saw how he remembered what he was supposed to say — and how he said just what the government wanted him to say when they questioned him. But not when he was cross-examined. He couldn't remember, he mumbled. Why? He was so worried he might forget his lines and make his keepers — the US government mad at him. Every struggle has their Benedict Arnold. Alfredo Mendez will be remembered as a pathetic worm who sold himself and his people. He is truly a man without a country, a man without principles and dignity. On the other hand, you have heard testimony about our unindicted co-conspirator, Guillermo Morales. He also left prison, but by a very different means and for different reasons. This is a man who escaped

attempts to label as terrorism is really resistance. Our prisoners are subjected to psychological and physical torture. If they didn't resist, they would die. If we don't resist US military and corporate plans for our nation, we will die. Resistance is our means of survival. If it were not for that, I can assure you I wouldn't be standing before you today. Let me assure you that as a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War and as a woman, I will continue to struggle until the day I die against any country that dares to wage terrorism against a people under the guise of "democracy." What is most important in my life is that Puerto Rico will be free. The rest is inconsequential. Puerto Rico will be free and socialist if we, the Puerto Rican people so desire. This is the way I, as a Puerto Rican, and not some "foreigner" — want it to be.

Thank you.

