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Cuban president sends congratulatory message to freed Puerto Rican nationalist

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Cuban President Raul Castro on Thursday congratulated Puerto Rican nationalist Oscar Lopez Rivera on his freedom after 36 years in prison in the United States.

In a message to the 74-year-old Puerto Rican nationalist, Castro said Cuba shares the joy of hundreds of thousands of people around the world for his liberation.

"History will not forget your determination and loyalty to the cause for the independence of Puerto Rico, which is essential for our America," added the Cuban leader in his message.

Castro said the people of Cuba will wait for a visit by Lopez Rivera in the coming months and he will receive the "honors and affection" that he deserves.

Lopez Rivera was freed on Wednesday from house arrest in his natal Puerto Rico after he was transferred there in February.

At a press conference, he thanked the solidarity of the Cuban people for his cause and confirmed he will visit Havana in November.

Lopez Rivera said the love for his country and his passion for Puerto Rico's freedom from U.S. colonial rule has not faded.

The Puerto Rican independence fighter, who is considered a hero to many Puerto Ricans, will be honored in the next few days in several U.S. cities and in the coming months will visit Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and other Latin American nations that supported him.

In 1981, Lopez Rivera was sentenced to 55 years in prison for his involvement in the Armed Forces of National Liberation, a pro-independence group responsible for dozens of bombings in Puerto Rico and several U.S. cities.

An additional 15 years were added to his sentence in 1988 after law enforcement foiled a plot to break him out of prison.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama commuted Lopez Rivera's sentence in January, along with 209 imprisoned individuals.

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