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Cuban Five now all free! Will the US blockade of Cuba now end?

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December 18, 2014 -- [Scoop](#) -- Cubans and many others around the world are jubilantly celebrating the return to Cuba on December 17 of Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino and Antonio Guerrero, the final three members of the Cuban Five to be released from US prisons, in a prisoner swap for US spy Alan Gross.

Cuba's President Raul Castro said in Havana that the release of the Cuban anti-terrorist fighters was the culmination of a respectful and reciprocal dialogue, without detriment to Cuba's national independence and sovereignty.

In a simultaneous address in the United States, President Barack Obama announced the release of Alan Gross, who arrived back in the United States on December 17 morning with his wife.

At the same time, both leaders announced a normalisation of relations, including re-establishment of diplomatic relations and an easing of US economic and travel restrictions on Cuba.

However, the complete lifting of the 50-year blockade requires US Congress approval.

In his announcement, Obama said that isolation has not worked, and it is time to try a new approach.

The release of the five Cubans is the outcome of over a decade of work by solidarity groups

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throughout the world, and diplomatic efforts from within and outside of Cuba.

The farcical trial and abuses of process that characterised the treatment of Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González from the moment of their arrest were roundly rejected by the Cuban and international public, as well as by legal groups and Nobel laureates -- and even the UN Committee on Arbitrary Detention.

At last, President Obama has used his presidential powers to serve justice.

The release of the Cuban Five and the normalisation of relations has resounded around the world.

The Vatican released a statement saying that Pope Francis "wishes to express his warm congratulations for the historic decision taken by the governments of the United States of America and Cuba to establish diplomatic relations, with the aim of overcoming, in the interest of the citizens of both countries, the difficulties which have marked their recent history."

We can only hope that the US Congress follows suit, and ends the crippling economic blockade that has caused such hardship and suffering to the Cuban people.

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