

49 Truths About the Death of Two Cuban Dissidents

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The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has just published a report accusing the Cuban government of the deaths of two Cuban dissidents in 2012. But the report does not stand up to scrutiny. Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero were killed in a road accident due to the carelessness of Angel Carromero, the driver.

1. In July 2012, Angel Carromero, a Spanish citizen, deputy secretary general of the Nuevas Generaciones organization, a youth movement of the conservative Spanish Popular Party (PP), and a collaborator of the Community of Madrid, and Swedish citizen Jens Aron Modig, leader of the Christian Democratic Youth League (KDU), linked to the Swedish right, traveled to Cuba on tourist visas.
2. Their mission, entrusted by their respective political parties, was to meet and finance certain members of the internal dissidence and to set up action plans against the Cuban government.
3. This type of activity, which is illegal in Cuba as in most countries of the world, is heavily punished by the penal code.
4. Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), received the sum of 4,000 dollars according to Modig.
5. On July 22, Carromero and Modig were in a car with Cuban dissidents Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero Escalante of the MCL and were involved in a road accident near the town of Bayamo.
6. The two Cuban dissidents, who were in the back of the car without seatbelts, lost their lives.
7. The foreign nationals, who were in the front of the vehicle and wearing seatbelts, were unharmed.

8. Payá died on impact from head trauma, while Cepero expired some time later in hospital following respiratory failure.

9. During his deposition at the Bayamo hospital where he was being treated, Carromero stated that he had not seen the road sign indicating a work zone and that he had lost control of his vehicle, hitting a tree. The Spanish news agency *EFE* confirms this version: "He did not see the slow-down sign and lost control of the vehicle".

10. The testimonies of three people who were in the area at the time of the accident, José Antonio Duque de Estrada Pérez, Lázaro Miguel Parra Arjona and Wilber Rondón Barrero, confirmed that the vehicle was speeding and had hit a tree after slipping on the road under construction.

11. The Swedish citizen, who escaped unhurt, returned to his country a few days later, after giving his statement.

12. Oswaldo Payá's daughter, María Payá, who was in Havana, reported to the press that a car had collided several times with her father's vehicle from behind, and accused the government of masterminding the assassination.

13. She stated that several people living in Sweden had received telephone text messages from Modig informing them that a vehicle had crashed into them.

14. However, the Payá family's version of events is contradicted by compelling factual evidence and numerous witness statements. In fact, in addition to the statements made by those present at the scene, photos of the crashed vehicle show no trace of impact to the rear.

15. Modig refuted the Payá family's version. According to him, no other vehicle was involved in the accident. Miami's *Nuevo Herald*, a daily newspaper representing the point of view of the Cuban exile, confirms these statements in an article entitled "Swedish politician denies the presence of other vehicles in the accident that claimed Payá's life".

16. Modig also denied María Payá's statements about the messages. According to him, he had not transmitted any messages to anyone in Sweden.

17. Carromero also denied the family version in an interview reported by *Agencias* and *EFE*: "No vehicle hit us from behind".

18. He also denounced the Payá family's conspiracy theories: "I ask the international community to focus on my repatriation and not to use a road accident, which could have happened to anyone, for political purposes".

19. Similarly, the accusations do not stand up to analysis. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that the Cuban government would have taken the risk of attacking the life of a famous dissident when he was with several witnesses, including two foreign nationals, who remained alive and were later released.

20. In a statement to the Stockholm newspaper, Modig's father, Lennart Myhr, explained that he had spoken to his son after the accident. At no time did he refer to another vehicle, or to persecution by Cuban intelligence services.

21. Dissident leader Elizardo Sánchez told *Agence France-Presse* that he did not believe in the conspiracy theory and that he thought it was an accident.
22. *El Nuevo Herald* published an article on the subject with the following headline: "Survivors reject the Payá family's version".
23. The Spanish daily *El País*, although unfavorable to the Cuban government, also cast doubt on the Payá family's version: "The thesis of a murky conspiracy to kill Payá, which the family and part of the opposition initially suggested, fades away following the statements by Carromero and Modig, who confirm that it was all a fatal accident".
24. After several days of investigation and questioning, Carromero was charged with manslaughter. Excessive speed was the main cause of the accident, according to the Cuban authorities.
25. According to the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, [Carromero's] 'lack of attention to vehicle control, excessive speed and erroneous decision to brake on a slippery surface were the causes of this tragic accident which cost the lives of two human beings".
26. After braking, the vehicle rolled over a distance of 63 meters, confirming the extreme speed.
27. In reality, this was not Carromero's first traffic offence. He is a dangerous repeat offender.
28. His driving license had been withdrawn in May 2012 for speeding. He was fined 520 euros and deducted six points, the heaviest penalty under the Spanish Highway Code, which is only applied when a vehicle exceeds the speed limit by more than double.
29. Carromero had therefore been driving illegally in Cuba.
30. Carromero had accumulated 45 fines for traffic offences since March 2011.
31. He had to pay a total of 3,700 euros.
32. After a trial lasting several weeks, the public prosecutor requested a seven-year prison sentence for manslaughter.
33. In October 2012, after deliberation, the Tribunal sentenced Carromero to four years' imprisonment.
34. In December 2012, after four months in prison, Carromero was authorized to serve the remainder of his sentence in Spain, following an agreement between Madrid and Havana.
35. Due to his status as a political leader, his sentence was adjusted to avoid prison. He wore an electronic bracelet.
36. In March 2013, in an interview with the *Washington Post*, Carromero went back on his initial statements and claimed that a car belonging to the State had rear-ended them, causing a loss of control of the vehicle and the accident.
37. Nevertheless, photographs of the vehicle show no traces of impact at the rear, contradicting the new Carromero version.

38. Carromero also stresses that he was drugged and forced to sign a statement at the trial.
39. This version is contradicted by the Spanish Consulate General in Cuba, which described the trial as “impeccable from a procedural point of view”.
40. In August 2013, in an interview with the Spanish daily *El Mundo*, Carromero asserted that “the Cuban secret service murdered Oswaldo Payá”.
41. In the *Washington Post* interview, Carromero claimed to have lost consciousness during the accident and only woke up in the ambulance: “Neither Oswaldo, Harold nor Aron were there”.
42. On the other hand, in his interview with *El Mundo*, he states that he remembers that Payá “was still alive after the accident”, contradicting his own statements to the *Washington Post*.
43. Ofelia Acevedo, Payá’s widow, stated that “Spain has proof that her husband was murdered”.
44. Questioned on this subject, the European Union expressed its reservations, limiting itself to the following statement: “If Mr. Carromero has new evidence on the tragic death of Sakharov Prize winner Oswaldo Payá, he should present it before the competent courts”.
45. For its part, the Spanish government chose to ignore Carromero’s new statements. Questioned on the subject, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dismissed the controversy: “Our point of view on this matter has been over since the day Mr. Carromero returned to Spain”.
46. Embarrassed by Carromero’s statements, the Popular Party chose to remain silent and refused to make any statement, announcing that it would not communicate on the subject.
47. Asturias MP Gaspar Llamazares urged Carromero to take his case to court, while questioning the credibility of these new statements. According to him, “if he had any proof, he would have presented it to the courts immediately or on his return to Spain”.
48. Deputy Teófilo de Luis, a member of the Popular Party, rejected Carromero’s new statements: “My government is limited to what he [Carromero] explained in Havana. It limits itself to applying the extradition agreement, according to what was said at the time”.
49. In March 2013, following the Payá family’s visit to Spain, Mariano Rajoy’s government expressed its reservations and declared “that it will not support an investigation into the death of Oswaldo Payá”, thereby legitimizing the conclusions reached by Havana.

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