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RONALD PATRICK LIPPERT

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

Recently questions have been raised in the news media concerning the number of representations made to the Government of Cuba concerning the case of Mr. Ronald Patrick Lippert who was arrested in Cuba on October 24, 1963 on a charge of arms smuggling. The Canadian Ambassador to Cuba was first informed of Mr. Lippert's arrest on October 30, 1963, i.e., six days after the arrest. He immediately requested consular access to him which was granted by the Cuban authorities the next day, October 31. A second interview with Mr. Lippert was granted five days later on November 4, 1963. On the same day the Ambassador had interviews with the Cuban authorities concerning the nature of the charges involved, details of the proposed trial, etc. Also on the same day the Secretary of State for External Affairs called in the Cuban Ambassador in Ottawa and expressed Canadian concern that Mr. Lippert should be granted a fair trial and requested information regarding the formal charges against him. On November 8, 1963, the Canadian Ambassador, acting on instructions, requested the Foreign Minister of Cuba to agree to the deportation of Mr. Lippert to Canada, but this request met with no response. On November 12, the Canadian Embassy was informed that Mr. Lippert's trial would take place four days later. Representations were made both in Cuba and Ottawa expressing concern at the suddenness of the trial date which was then postponed until November 23.

The trial, which was attended by the Canadian Ambassador, found Mr. Lippert guilty and sentenced him to 30 years of imprisonment. (Three days earlier the Ambassador, on instructions, had made strong representations to the Cuban Government expressing serious concern over the possible imposition of the death penalty.) On November 28, 1963, the Secretary of State for External Affairs called in the Cuban Ambassador and expressed the Government's shock at the length of Mr. Lippert's sentence.

Subsequent formal representations were made on 35 different occasions to the Cuban authorities, either by the Canadian Ambassador in Havana or by the Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Cuban Ambassador in Ottawa, on December 9, 1963; December 31, 1963; January 14, 1964; July 6, 1964; August 21, 1964; April 23, 1965; October 22, 1965; November 22, 1965; December 30, 1965; June 2, 1966; June 24, 1966; July 14, 1966; July 27, 1966; October 13, 1966; December 27, 1966; January 6, 1967; January 31, 1967; February 8, 1967; February 13, 1967; June 9, 1967; July 19, 1967; March 26, 1968; September 4, 1968; February 17, 1969; October 21, 1969; May 29, 1970; July 23, 1970; October 9, 1970; November 18, 1970; November 21, 1970; May 7, 1971; March 6, 1972; May 19, 1972; June 14, 1972; February 7, 1973. There were also many less formal representations made to Cuban officials both in Ottawa and in Havana.

These representations involved requests for clemency for Mr. Lippert, requests for assurances concerning his health, and requests for his early release on humanitarian grounds. Unfortunately, the repeated requests for his early release did not receive a favourable response until a few weeks ago when Mr. Lippert was finally released, one week after completing ten years of his sentence and thus becoming eligible for parole under Cuban law. It has been alleged that Mr. Lippert's release could have been obtained earlier if the Prime Minister had made direct representations to Premier Castro. At no time during all the years of Mr. Lippert's detention did the Cuban authorities ever indicate such additional Canadian representations were expected or would in any manner affect Cuban policy in regard to Mr. Lippert's detention.

In addition to the above representations, the Canadian Embassy made repeated requests, on the average of once a month, for permission to visit Mr. Lippert. Requests to visit him were granted three times in 1963; three times in 1964; three times in 1965; three times in 1966; six times in 1967; four times in 1968; four times in 1969; four times in 1970; four times in 1971; three times in 1972; and four times in 1973. It should be noted that visits were always subject to prior approval by the Cuban authorities, which often resulted in delays, and that on occasion Mr. Lippert refused to see Canadian consular officers who had come to visit him. In addition to these visits, the Department of External Affairs organized in July 1973 the visit to Havana of Mr. Lippert's sister and daughter, during which he was moved to the hotel where his relatives were staying. The Department of External Affairs raised part of the travel costs from a private source through its own channels.

It will be clear from the above that the Canadian Embassy and the Department of External Affairs exerted continuous efforts to persuade the Cuban authorities to release Mr. Lippert on humanitarian grounds and it is a matter of regret that the Government of Cuba did not feel itself able to respond to such requests until this year. On the other hand, it must be recognized that Mr. Lippert signed a written confession the day after his arrest and was tried and convicted in an open trial held under the provisions of Cuban law. While the Canadian Government, through the Department of External Affairs, exerts every effort to protect and assist Canadian citizens who are accused or convicted of breaking the laws of other countries, it does not claim, much less enjoy, any extra-territorial rights in other countries. Canadian citizens who violate the laws of other countries must expect to be dealt with in accordance with those laws, just as foreign nationals who violate the laws of Canada while in this country must expect to be dealt with as the laws of Canada provide. All that the Government can do in such cases is to appeal for leniency or clemency on humanitarian grounds, arrange for appropriate consular visits, etc., and ensure that Canadians in violation of foreign laws are treated no less fairly than the nationals of other nations or citizens of the country concerned would be treated, all of which was done on behalf of Mr. Lippert during his arrest, trial, conviction and imprisonment in Cuba.