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Outspoken Chávez foe seeks asylum in Miami

Robert Alonso, who advocated disobedience against Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, has surfaced in Miami seeking asylum.

by Alfonso Chardy



A Venezuelan ranch owner and strident opponent of President Hugo Chávez says he had nothing to do with dozens of Colombians who supposedly received paramilitary training at his farm near Caracas. **Robert Alonso** said the fighters likely were never on his property and that last spring's incident was a government plot to discredit him and Venezuela's opposition. **"It was payback for my tactics," Alonso** said, referring to his systematic calls for aggressive civil disobedience against Chávez.

In his first wide-ranging interview with a U.S. newspaper since going into hiding months ago, **Alonso** told The Herald he plans to stay in the United States by seeking haven under the Cuban Adjustment Act, which allows Cuban refugees who reach U.S. soil to stay. **Alonso** and his sister, María Conchita Alonso, the Hollywood actress, were born in Cuba and became Venezuelans when their parents

fled to the South American country after Fidel Castro seized power.

DETENTION PENDING

In Washington, Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez said that once it is confirmed **Alonso** is in the United States, he will ask the U.S. government to detain him for possible extradition. Alvarez said a warrant for **Alonso's** arrest, issued by a military prosecutor, is pending in Venezuela.

Reached at her home in California, María Conchita Alonso said she loved and admired her brother but declined to speak at length, citing concerns about the security of her family. Her parents and another brother still are in Venezuela. **"Anyone who fights for his beliefs you have to admire," she said. "Especially when you are truly outspoken against the power and your life may be in danger."**

She added: **"I'm very anti-communist and I don't want another Cuba in Venezuela. I just don't believe in Chávez policies. There is more poverty, more hunger and less security for people there than before."**

The story behind the arrests of about 80 alleged Colombian mercenaries began to unfold the night of May 8 when a woman called the Caracas Metropolitan Police to report the hijacking of two buses near El Hatillo, a tourist town near Venezuela's capital.

In an interview with The Herald three days after the incident, Metropolitan Police Cmdr. Luis Hernández Valera said three police cars responded to a thickly wooded suburb where officers found the buses packed with young men in military uniforms.

The government claimed that the "paramilitaries" had been training by **Alonso** at his farm -- Finca Daktari -- in a plot to kill Chávez.