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NEW JERSEY EDITION

2 get life in slaying of Letelier

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WASHINGTON — Two anti-Castro Cubans were sentenced yesterday to life in prison for their roles in what the judge called the "brutal, international murder conspiracy" that killed former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier.

A third Cuban-born militant, Ignacio Novo Sampol of Miami, was sentenced to eight years in prison for perjury and attempting to cover up the involvement of others in the murder.

The two who received life sentences were Alvin Ross Diaz and Guillermo Novo Sampol, Ignacio's brother, both of Union City, N.J. The three defendants were leaders in the militant Cuban Nationalistic Movement.

Letelier and a young associate, Ronnie Moffitt, died Sept. 21, 1976, when a bomb ripped through Letelier's car as they drove to work in a fashionable Washington area.

A former member of leftist Chilean President Salvador Allende's government, which was toppled in a 1973 military coup, Letelier came to Washington and became an outspoken critic of that military government. That role made him a target for assassination, according to federal government prosecutors.

The stern sentences — the maximum allowable — touched off an emotional courtroom outburst among friends of the three defendants, some cursing U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker Jr. in Spanish and English. A dozen U.S. marshals cleared the courtroom, while others drew close to Parker and the U.S. prosecutors in the case.

Mrs. Ignacio Novo burst into tears in protesting her husband's innocence, claiming — as the defendants had throughout the trial — that the Cuban Nationalist Movement had become the victim of a CIA plot.

The defendants remained calm throughout the sentencing. But when a courtroom bailiff grabbed Ignacio's arm to lead him from the room, Ignacio angrily shouted, "Take your hands off me." He could be heard shouting anew as he was led down a corridor behind the courtroom.

Guillermo Novo and Ross were among four Cuban militants accused of helping Chilean intelligence agent Michael Townley — a U.S. expatriate — carry out the murders. Townley confessed to building the bomb and masterminding the killing.

Townley, in return for pleading guilty to a lesser sentence of between three and 10 years, was the Justice Department's key witness in the month-long trial. He also implicated three high-ranking Chilean secret police officers, claiming that they ordered the assassination to silence Letelier's criticism of the military government.

The three Chileans have not yet been extradited to stand trial. Two other Cuban militants, meanwhile, remain fugitives.