

Omega 7 leader found guilty of murder, bombings

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NEW YORK — A federal jury Saturday found Eduardo Arocena, leader of the anti-Castro terrorist group known as Omega 7, guilty of murdering a Cuban diplomat and of participating in numerous bombings in New York and Miami.

After deliberating for more than four days, a duration that surprised both prosecutors and defense attorneys, the 12-member jury returned its verdict at 3:55 p.m. Jurors found Arocena guilty on 25 of 26 charges, including murder, conspiracy to murder, transporting explosives, possession of bombs and perjury.

The only account he was acquitted on was in connection with the bombing of Avery Fisher Hall in New York.

A 41-year-old former New Jersey dockworker, Arocena faces a mandatory life sentence on the murder conviction and could be sentenced to more than 200 years on the other charges.

U.S. District Judge Robert L. Ward set sentencing for 10 a.m. Oct. 26 in New York federal court.

"We expected it [the guilty verdict]," said Miami defense attorney Humberto Aguilar. "I thought the jury was marvelous. They questioned everything. They went over all of the evidence presented at the

Please turn to AROCENA / 5A

Omega 7's Arocena found guilty

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9-23-84-5

AROCENA / from 1A

trial very carefully, and you can't ask for more than that.

"I think justice was done," said Aguilar, who admitted that he was surprised the jury took more than four days to render its verdict. "I thought Wednesday afternoon or Thursday morning would have been more realistic," he said. Jurors began deliberating Tuesday at 3:15 p.m.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Tabak, the government's chief prosecutor who, in addition to working on other cases, spent more than two years compiling evidence against Omega 7, also said he believes justice was served.

"The jury deliberated very carefully and took all of the judges instructions very seriously," Tabak said. "The government is gratified by the verdict."

When the verdict was announced, Arocena's wife, Miriam, seated in the courtroom amid about 20 friends and relatives of the defendant, dropped her chin to her chest and began to sob. Arocena, listening to the Spanish translation on a headset, remained impassive.



Arocena

"He [Arocena] said that he accepted the verdict," said defense attorney Aguilar. "He was very calm. He said, 'I've only lost one — there's more to go.'"

In addition to his conviction in New York, Arocena faces more charges in Miami and New Jersey.

Although Aguilar said he believes additional trials would serve no purpose, he said Arocena, for one, probably would not oppose them.

"He has a political message, and this [a courtroom] is probably the best forum for him," Aguilar said.

"But considering he's already been convicted here and is facing a mandatory life sentence, any more trials would be a total waste of time and taxpayers' money," he said.

Throughout the five-week trial, prosecutors had contended that Arocena, acting as Omega 7 leader Omar, either ordered or participated in bombings of the Venezuelan, Nicaraguan and Mexican consulates, Replica magazine, American Airways Charter and Padron Cigars in Miami, as well as other bombings in New York. In addition, he was also charged with trying to kill Raul Roa Kouri, Cuba's delegate to the United Nations.

The six-man, six-woman jury, made up of 10 blacks, one white and one Hispanic, also found Arocena guilty of participating in the 1980 murder of Felix Garcia

Rodriguez, an attache for the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, who was shot to death in New York in 1980.

During the trial, federal prosecutors presented 85 witnesses and nine hours of taped telephone conversations between Arocena and FBI agents.

Testifying on his own behalf last week, Arocena repeatedly denied that he was Omar and that he had anything to do with any of the bombings and murder-conspiracy charges he is being tried for.

The only defense witness during the trial, Arocena told jurors that FBI agents, frustrated that he would not cooperate in their investigation of Omega 7, kidnapped him, drugged him and threatened his family. He was arrested in Miami by FBI agents in July 1983.

Arocena indicated he will appeal the conviction.

After the verdict was announced, about a dozen Cuban Americans who came to the courthouse to support Arocena said they were dismayed at the trial's outcome.

"As you know, the government of the U.S. is in conversations with Castro right now," said Pedro Hernandez, president of the Union City, N.J.-based Cuban Defense League. "As a staunch anti-Communist, Arocena is a threat to any relationship between the U.S. and Castro."

"So I think Mr. Arocena has been set up by the FBI and the government," Hernandez said. "To make the Cuban exile freedom-fighter disappear would be a nice gesture to Castro. That is the name of the game with this trial here."