

# Exile sentenced to 9 years for refusing to testify

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From Herald Staff and Wire Reports

NEW YORK — A Cuban exile who refused to testify before a grand jury investigating murders and bombings linked to the anti-Castro group Omega 7 was sentenced Thursday to nine years in jail for criminal contempt of court.

It is believed to be the longest prison sentence ever imposed for criminal contempt, U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani said.

Ramon Sanchez, 29, who made his home in Miami, has refused to talk to the federal grand jury investigating Omega 7, despite guarantees of immunity from prosecution.

Omega 7, dedicated to the overthrow of Cuban leader Fidel Castro, has claimed responsibility for more than 30 bombings and

two murders, most in the New York area.

Sanchez has been in jail for the past 17 months on civil contempt charges for refusing to cooperate. During that time, he staged a 22-day hunger strike to protest his imprisonment. He was force-fed by court order.

In April, Sanchez was convicted of criminal contempt for his continuing refusal to talk to the grand jury. The penalty for criminal contempt is up to the discretion of the judge, but Giuliani said he never heard of a judge imposing a sentence longer than five years.

In U.S. District Court in Manhattan, Judge David Edelstein imposed the nine-year sentence on Sanchez.

In a letter to Edelstein, Sanchez described himself as a "soldier of good cause." He told the judge that attempts to overthrow Castro were no different from CIA activities during the Bay of Pigs.

In appearances before the grand jury, Sanchez was asked if he knew who had placed a bomb under the car of the Cuban ambassador to the United Nations, who had built the bomb, or who had provided the explosives. He refused to answer.

Eduardo Arocena, the reputed leader of Omega 7, has told the government that it was Sanchez who built the remote control bomb used in the unsuccessful assassination attempt, Assistant U.S. Attorney David Zornow said. Arocena said that Sanchez is not

officially a member of Omega 7, Zornow said.

Arocena is in custody and awaiting trial on charges of conspiring to murder the Cuban diplomat and on charges he took part in the bombings in Miami and Manhattan.

A spokesman for the Miami-based anti-Castro group that Sanchez headed before his imprisonment, the Organization for the Liberation of Cuba, said the harsh sentence "was something to be expected."

"We are the target of federal persecution," said spokesman Orlando Gutierrez, "because we are an example for the rest of the exile community. This will only make us cling more to our principles and continue the fight."