



An art show by French artist Julien Nonnon called "Safari Urbain Sthlm" is projected on a building in Sodermalm, Stockholm on November 25, 2016. — AFP

Party in Miami as news of Fidel Castro's death spreads

To cries of "Cuba Libre!" and "Freedom! Freedom!" Cuban-Americans poured on to the streets of Miami early Saturday to celebrate the death of their nemesis Fidel Castro. Revelers, many of whom were exiled by Havana's communist regime, honked car horns, banged on pots and drums, and danced, cried, and waved Cuban flags in a wave of communal euphoria.

Castro died late Friday, his brother and Cuban President Raul Castro announced on national television around midnight. In Miami-home to the largest concentration of Cuban-Americans in the United States-the news spread quickly and with fervor. "It's sad that one finds joy in the death of a person-but that person should never have been born," said Pablo Arcencibia, 67, a teacher who fled Cuba 20 years ago. "Satan is now the one who has to worry," because "Fidel is heading there and is going to try to get his job," joked Arcencibia, amid the loud party-like atmosphere.

Sensing the historic moment, younger revelers streamed the event on Facebook Live, posted pictures on Instagram, and broadcast the celebrations on FaceTime and Skype to friends and relatives on the island.

Little Havana and Hialeah-Miami neighborhoods where many Cuban exiles settled-saw people dance, hug, and exchange comments like "it took so long!" and "now only Raul is missing." "Cuba Libre"-Free Cuba-has been a rallying cry for exiles ever since the Castro brothers took over Cuba in 1959. The rum and Coke drink of the same name, however predates the Castro regime. Some two million Cubans live in the United States, nearly 70 percent of them in Florida.

Pajama party

The late-breaking news roused some out of bed to join the street party in pajamas. Some sang the Cuban national anthem. Others shook up bottles of champagne and sprayed



fizz among the revelers. People of all ages-mostly of Cuban descent, but also some Americans-gathered. "It's a major moment for the Cuban community and I'm with them," said a retired Florida native named Debbie. "I live in Little Havana and this is a big part of our lives. The community always comes together here."

Debbie and her friend Cuban-American Aymara celebrated outside the Cafe Versailles, where for decades exiles met to plot their return to the island and strategies to protest the Castro regime. "He should have died a long time ago! He's a criminal, a murderer and a wretched being!" screamed Hugo Ribas, a 78 year-old retiree, in a voice full of rage mixed with

euphoria. "The brother should have died too-in that family they're all criminals!" said Ribas, who has been in Miami for four years. "It took too long," said Cuban immigrant Analia Rodriguez, 23, who has been in Miami for ten years. "There was too much pain and too many broken families, and now-I'm happy!" she laughed as her boyfriend streamed the conversation with AFP on his mobile phone.

Arcencibia noted the mix of generations in the crowd, which was unlike the group of elderly Cuban exiles who gathered just weeks ago to hear then-candidate Donald Trump fulminate against the Castro regime. "Those people who said that the exile community is one of old men, they should see here that ... the desire of a democratic and progressive Cuba is a wish of all Cubans," she said.

Venezuelans also party

Some Venezuelan flags fluttered in the crowd among those of Cuba and the United States, and chants against the leftist pro-Cuban government of Nicolas Maduro could be heard. A group named Veppex that says it represents Venezuelans being politically persecuted issued a statement stating that it joined the Cuban exile community "in their euphoria ... over the death of dictator Fidel Castro Ruiz."

Now that Castro has died, "Nicolas Maduro is now without a political brain," the statement read. Castro's death "is the first step for the absolute disappearance of this atrocious leftist regime," the group said.

Some 100,000 Venezuelans live in the south Florida area. Many of them arrived since the socialist government took over in their country starting in 1999. — AFP



Cuban Americans celebrate upon hearing about the death of longtime Cuban leader Fidel Castro in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami yesterday. — AFP