

Business Briefing

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08Jul89 CUBA: CUBANS AWAIT NEWS ON DEATH SENTENCES.

By By **Lionel Martin**

HAVANA, July 8, Reuter - The fate of four Cuban army and state security officers sentenced to death on Friday, including a former comrade of Fidel Castro, was in the hands of Cuba's Supreme Court on Saturday.

If the court upholds the sentences Castro himself must decide whether the condemned men go before a firing squad.

A military tribunal reached the verdict after deliberating for two days following a trial that cast an international spotlight on the Communist island-nation's worst ever drug and corruption scandal.

Sentenced to death were General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez, a former head of Cuban military forces in Angola and Ethiopia who fought alongside Castro in the 1959 revolution; his aide Captain Jorge Martinez; Colonel Antonio de la Guardia, who headed an intelligence agency, and Major Amado Padron, who was under Ochoa's command.

Ten other army and state security officers were sentenced to long prison terms, the state news agency AIN reported.

Under Cuban law all death sentences must be upheld by the supreme court. If the court approves the sentences they will automatically go up for ratification before the Cuban Council of State which Castro heads as president.

European diplomatic sources said Castro hinted at the possibility of clemency for Ochoa last week to European Community ambassadors.

There was little consensus on what the 63-year-old Castro would do if he became the court of last resort, however.

"He has no other choice than to uphold the death sentence as an object lesson to Cubans and proof to the world that Cuba has nothing to do with drug trafficking," a dentist said.

But other Cubans believe Castro will show clemency.

"All these men spent years as honest revolutionaries," a hotel clerk said. "Fidel knows that executing them doesn't prove anything because the lesson has already been made clear."

Ochoa and the other 13 were charged with embezzlement and helping Colombia's notorious Medellin drug cartel to smuggle six tons of cocaine into the United States. They were said to have accepted 3.4 million dollars in bribes.