

ELIAN'S GREAT-UNCLE DISCUSSES CUSTODY TRANSFER; HE TALKS TO PSYCHIATRISTS ABOUT HOW TO AVOID TRAUMATIZING THE BOY

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Body

After refusing for months to return Elian Gonzalez to his father, the boy's great-uncle met with government-appointed psychiatrists Monday to discuss how to make the transfer without traumatizing the child.

The meeting lasted only an hour, despite the government's suggestion that it would take as long as three hours. There was no immediate explanation from the two sides, but Ed Rosasco, president of the hospital where the meeting took place, said it was cordial.

Most of Miami's Cuban-American community acknowledges that Elian's stay could be coming to an end. Police estimated that at least 15,000 people gathered Monday night in the streets of Little Havana to pray and sing, and many marched the few blocks to the great-uncle's house.

"All we have left"

Police closed about 30 city blocks and said protesters were friendly and expressed themselves peacefully.

"This is all we have left, is to do these peaceful demonstrations," said Carlos Rodriguez, 36. "We're not the aggressive Mafia that they're portraying us as."

Immigration and Naturalization Service officials agreed to hold the meeting at Mercy Hospital to accommodate Elian's great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez, who said he could not leave his 21-year-old daughter, Marisleysis. The young woman, who has been a mother figure to Elian, has been hospitalized since Saturday for stress and exhaustion and did not attend the meeting.

Attorney General Janet Reno had described the meeting as an important step toward reuniting Elian with his father this week. The father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, flew from Cuba to Washington on Thursday and met with the two psychiatrists and a psychologist Sunday.

The boy also did not attend Monday's meeting. His Miami relatives had made it clear they were unhappy that the psychiatrists would not evaluate Elian. They said such an examination would conclude that he should not be returned to his father.

The immigration service and the family declined to comment on what happened in the meeting. A Justice Department official said on the condition of anonymity that the three doctors would brief officials today in Washington. Decisions on how to arrange the transfer were being deferred until then, the official said.

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Among the options under consideration are bringing Elian to a neutral site in Florida to be turned over either to Juan Miguel, if he will go there, or to a third party who would bring him to Juan Miguel in Maryland, the official said. A more remote option would be for the Miami relatives to bring Elian to Juan Miguel in Maryland.

"We are not aware of Juan Miguel proposing to go to Florida," the official said.

Reno also planned to meet today with Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas, Miami Mayor Joe Carollo and possibly one of **Elian's great-uncles**, Lazaro or Delfin Gonzalez, the official said.

Penelas agreed to confine the meeting to a discussion of **how** the reunification will occur - not whether or when, the official said.

Family files court brief

Also Monday, the family filed a brief in their appeal of a federal judge's ruling that the Immigration and Naturalization Service acted properly in ordering Elian returned to his father.

The family argued that because children as young as Elian are allowed to testify in serious criminal trials, the immigration service should take his desires into account in an asylum hearing - rather than assert, as it has, that only his father can speak for him.

The family also has been hoping to win **custody** of Elian in state court, but the judge in that case sharply questioned the family's tactics. Circuit Judge Jennifer D. Bailey asked the Miami family to explain by today why she should hear the case.

She said family members had shown no evidence that Elian would be harmed if returned to his father and asked them **how** she could overrule the federal decision.

"The people are with you"

Elian returned to his relatives' house Monday evening with Lazaro Gonzalez, who walked him around so he could be seen by the crowd. Carrying two balloons, he ran into the back yard. "Elian, my friend, the people are with you," the crowd chanted.

Demonstrators at the house have vowed to form a human chain to prevent the government from taking Elian. Ramon Saul Sanchez, president of the Cuban-exile Democracy Movement, said he was "planning to exercise whatever influence we have" over demonstrators to assure nonviolence.

At least 1,000 of the protesters Monday night milled in front of the home - an unusually massive throng. **About** 10 police officers stood just on the other side of the barricade and faced the crowd, while Sanchez asked people to move back.

"People feel that his time is probably running out, and a lot of people are desperate," said Ninoska Perez, spokeswoman for the Cuban American National Foundation.

Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder said on CBS on Monday that the Justice Department would develop a plan to keep Elian safe in a potentially volatile environment.

"We would hope that we would be able to set up something so that Elian will not have to be carried through a throng of people in Miami," Holder said.

Graphic

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HOW TO AVOID TRAUMATIZING THE BOY

PHOTO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Photo - Cuban immigrant Jose Guerrero stands with supporters Monday outside the home of Elian Gonzalez's relatives in Miami.

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