
amnesty international

CUBA

Questions and answers on the work of Amnesty International

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Why does Amnesty International work on Cuba ?

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for human rights. Its work is based on careful research and on the standards agreed by the international community. Those standards apply universally, to all countries across the globe; and Amnesty International strives to apply them to all countries equally. The organization's credibility stems in part from this effort to hold all governments everywhere accountable to the same internationally-recognized human rights principles.

Why does Amnesty International criticize human rights violations in Cuba, when it has been much more successful than most countries in the hemisphere at providing a reasonable standard of health care and education to all its people ?

Amnesty International works independently and impartially to promote respect for all the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization believes in the principle that human rights are interdependent and indivisible -- all human rights should be enjoyed by all people at all times, and no one set of rights can be enjoyed at the expense of other rights. People cannot fully advance their economic, social and cultural rights without the space that comes from respect for civil and political rights. Economic and social development, in practice, rarely benefits the poorest and most disadvantaged unless these groups are able to participate fully in society and to hold the government accountable by exercising freely their political and civil rights. Similarly, people cannot exercise their political rights or safeguard their civil freedoms if they are marginalized from society by poverty or their social position.

To date, Amnesty International has contributed to building respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by taking action against violations of certain fundamental civil and political rights. When violations of these rights occur, in Cuba or elsewhere, it is Amnesty International's job to draw attention to them and make recommendations to the government concerned to remedy the situation. At the same time, Amnesty International is working to promote awareness of the whole range of political, civil, economic and social rights, and the organization's mandate is evolving, evincing an ever-growing sensitivity to the need to address a wider range of human rights in all aspects of its work.

What about the US embargo against Cuba ?

Amnesty International recognizes that the US embargo has contributed to a climate in which human rights violations occur in Cuba. The embargo does so, in part, by serving as a rationale for the Cuban state to maintain legislation that outlaws the exercise of fundamental freedoms. In addition, by curtailing access to medicines and other basic supplies, the embargo makes conditions for all Cubans, including prisoners of conscience, political prisoners or other detainees, more difficult. Although Amnesty International takes no general position on the legitimacy of economic sanctions against governments or armed groups anywhere in the world, it recognizes that such sanctions can have adverse implications for all human rights: economic, social, cultural, civil and political. Amnesty International is therefore in the process of reviewing its policy on economic sanctions in order to determine the grounds on which it will take the step of explicitly opposing sanctions that can reasonably be assumed to contribute to grave human rights abuses.

Is Amnesty International anti-capitalist or anti-communist ?

Amnesty International is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights as described in the human rights standards agreed by the international community. Those standards apply universally, to all countries, and Amnesty International strives to apply them to all countries equally.

The organization's funding comes primarily from the activities of individual members, who are all volunteer activists -- people in more than 140 countries who give freely of their time and energy in solidarity with the victims of human rights violations. They come from all walks of life, with widely different political and religious views, united by the determination to work for a world where everyone enjoys human rights. As an organization Amnesty International is aware that violations of these rights can occur under all sorts of political and economic systems; its job is to oppose them wherever they occur.

Is Amnesty International for a change of government in Cuba ?

Amnesty International takes no position on the political ideology or composition of any government, in Cuba or elsewhere -- its job is simply to oppose violations of a specific set of

human rights, wherever they occur, and to promote the full respect of all human rights under all systems of government. All governments, regardless of their ideology, have the obligation to ensure that the human rights of all people under their jurisdiction are respected; this is the only aspect of national political life with which Amnesty International is concerned.

Does Amnesty International support dissident activity in Cuba ?

Amnesty International does not support or oppose any kind of political activity. It does support the right of people to peacefully express their opinions and beliefs. If they are imprisoned for such peaceful expression, Amnesty International calls them prisoners of conscience and works for their unconditional release. If, on the other hand, people have taken up arms against their government, or have incited others to violence, Amnesty International would not call them prisoners of conscience and would not work for their release if they were imprisoned. It would only take up their cases if they were given unfair trials or subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

Amnesty International works in support of fair trials for all political prisoners, regardless of their ideology or means of expressing it, and it campaigns for the right of all people to be free from torture or ill-treatment. Many of those critical of the Cuban government have in the past been prisoners of conscience; undergone unfair trials; received death sentences; or suffered poor prison conditions. When this happens in Cuba, as in any other country, Amnesty International works on behalf of the victims of these violations.

What are Amnesty International's current concerns in Cuba ?

Amnesty International is concerned that there are still a number of prisoners of conscience in Cuba, although the number of people identified as such has decreased significantly over the past years. Amnesty International continues to call for their unconditional release, and for the repressive laws under which they are often convicted to be abolished. The organization is unconditionally opposed to the use of the death penalty, and monitors the use of the death penalty in Cuba; while there appears to be a moratorium on executions, prisoners continue to receive death sentences and Cuba has not abolished this cruel and irrevocable form of punishment. Amnesty International is also concerned about the harassment of dissidents, which has the effect of infringing their basic freedoms of speech, association and assembly.

Does the Cuban government authorize Amnesty International to visit Cuba ?

In its research work throughout the world, Amnesty International seeks the facts. It sends experts to talk with victims, observe trials, and interview local human rights activists and officials. It monitors thousands of media outlets and maintains contact with reliable sources of information all over the world. Amnesty International does not visit countries clandestinely, as for its own credibility the organization considers the accord and cooperation of the government to be vital. In the case of Cuba, Amnesty International has not visited the country for over ten years, as the Cuban authorities have not replied to the organization's written requests to visit the country. However, Amnesty International continues to try to engage the Cuban authorities on

the issue of access, as it considers it to be an important element in investigating the human rights situation and confirming information received from other sources.

Does Amnesty International support the passage of United Nations Human Rights Commission resolutions criticizing Cuba's human rights record?

For the UN Commission on Human Rights session each year, Amnesty International selects a limited number of priority countries on which to focus its efforts; Cuba has not been among them. Proposals for a resolution on Cuba are often widely perceived as a US-driven initiative, and Amnesty International believes that a resolution which is perceived as coloured by a bilateral relationship would not be the best means to further the protection of human rights in Cuba. For these reasons, while it welcomes scrutiny by the United Nations of substantive human rights concerns in any country, Amnesty International has not been involved in the discussions of Cuba's human rights record at the UN Human Rights Commission and does not take a position in the debates for or against any resolution regarding Cuba. The information that the organization publishes on Cuba is available to the members of the Commission as to all members of the general public.

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