

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 25/006/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 061
16 March 2004

Embargo Date: 16 March 2004 00:01 GMT

Cuba: Government must release prisoners of conscience immediately

A new report by Amnesty International reveals the current state of 75 prisoners of conscience arrested during the March 2003 crackdown when scores of dissidents were detained in a series of targeted sweeps. Some were subsequently released, but many were subjected to hasty and manifestly unfair trials and sentenced to long prison terms.

"After a detailed review of the legal cases against them, it is clear that they are prisoners of conscience -- detained for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. They should be released immediately and unconditionally," Amnesty International said.

Cuba: One year too many : prisoners of conscience from the March 2003 crackdown provides details of the current status of the majority of the dissidents. The dissidents were accused of activities such as publishing articles critical of economic, social or human rights issues in Cuba; being involved in unofficial groups considered by the authorities to be counter-revolutionary or having contacts with individuals viewed as hostile to Cuba's interests.

The report also details the conditions in which the detainees are held. Amnesty International has received some allegations of ill-treatment by prison guards or by other prisoners with the complicity of prison guards. In one case, Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona was reportedly taken from his cell and beaten by three prison guards on 31 December 2003.

There have also been allegations that prisoners have been held in solitary confinement for extended periods and that prisoners have received inadequate access to medical care.

In particular Amnesty International denounces the practice of deliberately incarcerating these prisoners of conscience at extreme distances from their homes and families. This practice contravenes United Nations principles and can be construed as an additional penalty imposed upon the prisoners and their families.

Written and telephone communications between many prisoners and their families have also been restricted, reportedly as a form of harassment by prison officials.

"The Cuban authorities must immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience.

In addition we call upon the authorities to comply with the principles laid out in international human rights standards for the treatment of prisoners," the organization concluded.

Amnesty International has recorded a total of 88 prisoners of conscience in Cuba.

For a copy of the report *Cuba: One year too many : prisoners of conscience from the March 2003 crackdown* please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR250052004>

Public Document

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