

URGENT ACTION

INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST ARRESTED

On 11 September 2019, authorities arrested independent Cuban journalist Mr Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces in Cuba, after he was convicted of resistance and disobedience in August 2019. He is a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Miguel Díaz Canel
President of the Republic of Cuba
Hidalgo, Esquina 6. Plaza de la Revolución
La Habana, CP 10400
Cuba
Email: despacho@presidencia.gob.cu
Twitter: @DiazCanelB

Dear President Díaz-Canel,

I write to you to condemn the imprisonment of Mr Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces, a Cuban independent journalist at Cubanet, arrested on 11 September, after being convicted of resistance and disobedience and sentenced to one-year in prison in August 2019.

Over decades, Amnesty International has documented how criminal code provisions such as “resistance” to public officials carrying out their duties and “disobedience” have been used to stifle the rights to freedom of expression in Cuba. This imprisonment is yet another example of a tired trend that has continued under your administration.

I therefore demand the immediate and unconditional release of Mr Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces. Pending his release, he should be allowed access to his family and not be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to information available to Amnesty International, Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces, a lawyer and independent journalist at the news website *Cubamet*, was arrested on 11 September 2019 in Cuba after being convicted in August 2019 by the Municipal Court in the city of Guantanamo for resistance and disobedience.

According to the journalist, in April national police had detained and beaten him. As a result, he had made a formal complaint against them. On August 23, an appeal court upheld his conviction, without granting him a further oral hearing.

Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces also alleges that he was arbitrarily detained on previous occasions, as early as 2015.

On 20 August, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Office of the Special Rapporteur condemned the prison sentence against journalist Roberto Quiñones and expressed concern about the persistence of criminalization and harassment against communicators and human rights defenders in Cuba. The Office of the Special Rapporteur in a recent report on Cuba, found that state agents are the "main source of threats and attacks against the press" and called on this practice to be "dismantled and sanctioned."

Amnesty International has found that the disproportionate and arbitrary use of the criminal law, and campaigns of state-sponsored discrimination against those who dare to speak out, coupled with discriminatory dismissals from state-employment, and the lack of an independent judiciary to challenge this, has created a profound climate of fear in Cuba.

In August, Amnesty International named five prisoners of conscience in Cuba, likely representing only a tiny fraction of those behind bars for peacefully expressing their views. Those five prisoners of conscience belong to political and pro-democracy groups not recognized by the state – all of whom have been imprisoned for crimes that are either inconsistent with international law or that have been used for decades in Cuba to silence critical voices.

The dominant official media remains heavily censored and limited in Cuba. While an increasing range of autonomous digital media projects have emerged in recent years, alternative online news sources operate within a legal limbo that exposes journalists and media workers to the risk of harassment and arbitrary detention. Moreover, their webpages are often blocked by the authorities in Cuba.

Cuba remains the only country in the Americas which Amnesty International is not permitted to enter for human rights monitoring work.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish, English

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 September 2019

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces (He, his, him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a