

PUBLIC

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UA 69/09 Intimidation/Harassment

CUBA Ivonne Mallesa (f)
Other members of Damas de Blanco

Ivonne Mallesa was reportedly briefly detained by the Cuban Security forces on 10 March having been previously detained and released two days earlier. Amnesty International is concerned that there were no legal grounds for either detention and believes she was held as a form of intimidation and harassment intended to prevent her from exercising her rights of freedom of expression, assembly and association. Amnesty International is also concerned that others may be similarly detained in the run up to the sixth anniversary of a crackdown on dissidents on 18 March.

Ivonne Mallesa was reportedly detained at her home on 10 March by members of the State Security forces. She was taken to a *casa de visita* - a government premises used to organize public events and meetings. After four hours she was released without charge. Security officials told her that she would be sent to prison for 20 years if she continued to support the Damas de Blanco (Ladies in white), an unofficial group formed by women who are relatives and friends of the people imprisoned in the March 2003 crackdown.

Prior to her second arrest, Ivonne Mallesa had reportedly been detained at 9.30am on 8 March at her home by members of the State Security forces. She was driven to the Fourth Police Unit in the capital Havana and held until 3.30pm when she was released without charge.

On 8 March, two other members of the Damas de Blanco were detained by members of State Security forces and released after a few hours. Three other members were prevented from leaving their homes by members of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), Comités de Defensa de la Revolución and State Security forces. They appear to have been prohibited from participating in activities organized by the Damas de Blanco to commemorate International Women's Day on 8 March. All the women were warned by the State Security and CDRs not to participate again in any of the activities organized by the Damas de Blanco.

Damas de Blanco also believes these acts are an attempt by the Cuban authorities to halt activities to commemorate the 6th anniversary of the crackdown on dissidents which takes place on 18-19 March. In 2003, over several days, the Cuban authorities arrested 75 men and women for their peaceful expression of opinions critical of the government. They were subjected to summary trials and were sentenced to long prison terms of up to 28 years. Amnesty International declared the 75 convicted dissidents to be prisoners of conscience and 55 remain in prison.

Damas de Blanco organize peaceful marches where they distribute flowers and call for the release of their relatives and friends who are still in prison. In 2005, Damas de Blanco was awarded The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament. The five representatives nominated by the group to collect the award in Strasbourg were unable to travel from Cuba, because they did not receive the necessary travel documents from the Cuban authorities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Freedoms of expression, assembly and association are severely limited in Cuba in law and in practice. Those who attempt to express views or organize meetings or form organizations that contradict government policy and/or the aims of the state are likely to be subjected to punitive measures such as imprisonment, loss of employment, harassment or intimidation. Short term detention is commonly used to intimidate human rights defenders and political dissidents.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- seeking specific details of the reasons for Ivonne Mallesá's arrest and that of the two other members of Damas de Blanco;
- asking the authorities to cease the harassment, persecution and imprisonment of human rights defenders and political dissidents who are merely exercising their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and to allow them to obtain legal status for their organizations;
- calling for a reform of laws, regulations and administrative practices which curtail freedom of expression, association and assembly.

APPEALS TO:

Head of State and Government

Raúl Castro Ruz

Presidente

La Habana, Cuba

**Fax: + 53 7 8333085 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
or + 1 2127791697 (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)**

Email: cuba@un.int (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)

Salutation: Su Excelencia/ Your Excellency

Attorney-General

Dr Juan Escalona Reguera

Fiscal General de la República,

Fiscalía General de la República, San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba

Fax: + 53 7 860 4268

Salutation: Señor Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Interior Minister

General Abelardo Coloma Ibarra

Ministro del Interior y Prisiones

Ministerio del Interior, Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Cuba

Email: webmaster@one.gov.cu

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Cuba accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 April 2009.