

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE ON HUNGER STRIKE

Independent journalist and prisoner of conscience Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias is on hunger strike to protest against his detention in Cuba. As a result, he has been placed in solitary confinement in a punishment cell.



Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias © Hablemos Press

On 6 March, journalist **Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias** went on hunger strike to protest against his detention in Combinado del Este prison on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba. He was consequently transferred by the prison authorities to a punishment cell. According to his relatives, the small cell where he is now held has no light, toilet facilities or bedding, and he is not permitted to leave the cell to exercise in the open air. These kinds of punitive measures are typically used by the Cuban authorities against prisoners on hunger strike.

Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias works for the unofficial news agency, Let's Talk Press (*Hablemos Press*). He was arrested in Havana on 16 September 2012 by the Cuban Revolutionary Police (*Policía Revolucionaria de Cuba*) at José Martí International Airport in Havana. He had been investigating allegations that medicine provided by the World Health Organization to fight the cholera outbreak (which began in mid-2012) was being kept at the airport instead of being distributed. Since then, he has been detained in various detention centres. He has been held at Combinado del Este prison since November 2012.

Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias is yet to be formally charged by the public prosecutor, and according to his relatives he is reportedly being accused of "disrespect" (*desacato*). Amnesty International believes Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias' detention is politically motivated and related to his peaceful exercise of freedom of expression.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the Cuban authorities to release Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to remove him from solitary confinement, and ensure he is granted any medical attention he may require;
- Urging them to refrain from taking punitive measures against prisoners for undertaking hunger strikes.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 APRIL 2013 TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Darío Delgado Cura
Fiscal General de la República,
Fiscalía General de la República,
Amistad 552, e/Monte y Estrella,
Centro Habana,
La Habana, Cuba

Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Interior Minister

General Abelardo Coloma Ibarra
Ministro del Interior y Prisiones
Ministerio del Interior,
Plaza de la Revolución,
La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +1 212 779 1697 (via Cuban
Mission to UN)

Email: correominint@mn.mn.co.cu

Salutation: Your Excellency

And solidarity letters to:

Centro de Información Hablemos Press
Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez –
Director
calle Santa Marta 394, Apto 3 alto, entre
Franco y Subirana, municipio Centro
Habana, La Habana, Cuba
Email: robersm2007@gmail.com

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 25/13. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR25/001/2013/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Restrictions on the Cuban media are stringent and pervasive and clearly stop those in the country from enjoying their right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. The state maintains a total monopoly on television, radio, the press, internet service providers, and other electronic means of communication.

Article 53 of the Cuban Constitution recognizes freedom of the press but expressly prohibits private ownership of the mass media: "Citizens have freedom of speech and of the press in keeping with the objectives of socialist society. Material conditions for the exercise of that right are provided by the fact that the press, radio, television, cinema, and other mass media are state or social property and can never be private property. This assures their use at exclusive service of the working people and in the interests of society. The law regulates the exercise of those freedoms." Although there is no censorship law that explicitly regulates the functioning of the press or establishes what is published, journalists must join the Cuban Journalists Association (*Unión de Periodistas Cubanos*, UPEC) in order to practice journalism in the state-owned media. UPEC is self-governing; however, in its statutes it recognizes the Cuban Communist Party as "the highest leading force of society and of the state" and agrees to abide by Article 53 of the Constitution (see above).

Compulsory membership of a professional association for the practice of journalism is an unlawful restriction on freedom of expression and a violation of the right to freedom of association. Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that, "no one may be compelled to belong to an association". In the particular case of UPEC, whose members are employees of the government of Cuba, compulsory membership is a means of exerting political control in the field of communications. Only journalists expressing views in line with official government policies are accredited by UPEC; independent journalists are barred from joining.

The news agency Hablemos Press is an unofficial Cuban news agency founded in February 2009 by independent journalists and human rights activists, "for the purpose of gathering and disseminating news within the country and for the rest of the world" according to their website. Hablemos Press journalists are regular victims of short-term arrests and harassment related to their work. Prior to his September arrest, Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias had been detained without charge on a number of occasions in 2012. On 11 September 2012 the director of Hablemos Press – Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez – was forced into a car and reportedly beaten as he was driven to a police station. Before being released, he was told that he had become the "number one dissident journalist" and would face imprisonment if he continued his activities.

Amnesty International believes no prisoner should be confined long term in conditions of isolation and reduced sensory stimulation, and that conditions of detention should conform to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and other international human rights standards. Amnesty International believes that if solitary confinement is used, strict limits should be imposed on the practice, including regular and adequate medical supervision by a doctor.

Hunger strikes are often used in Cuba by political dissidents and other activists as a way of protest, and demonstrate the situation of despair and hopelessness that they face when victims of unfair and prolonged incarcerations. For further information, see: *Cuba must release prisoner of conscience on hunger strike* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/cuba-must-release-prisoner-conscience-hunger-strike-2011-03-11>). In September 2012 Jorge Vázquez Chaviano carried out a hunger strike after the Cuban authorities failed to release him following the end of his 18-month prison sentence. In recent years hunger strikes have led to the death of two prisoners: Orlando Zapata Tamayo (see: *Death of Cuban prisoner of conscience on hunger strike must herald change*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/death-cuban-prisoner-conscience-hunger-strike-must-herald-change-2010-02-24>) in February 2010, and Wilmar Villar Mendoza (see: *Cuban authorities 'responsible' for activist's death on hunger strike*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/cuban-authorities-responsible-activists-death-hunger-strike-2012-01-20>) in January 2012 – both prisoners of conscience.

Name: Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 25/13 Index: AMR 25/002/2013 Issue Date: 14 March 2013