
amnesty international

CUBA

Prisoner of Conscience

José Orlando González Bridón

19 June 2001

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Amnesty International believes that *José Orlando González Bridón* is a prisoner of conscience, detained for the non-violent exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. He was recently sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

José Orlando González Bridón, Secretary General of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba (CTDC)*, Cuban Democratic Workers' Union, and a writer of news articles, was detained on 15 December 2000, prior to a religious procession which was due to take place two days later in Havana. Many activists were also temporarily detained that day.

He was tried on 24 May 2001 and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, charged with "*difusión de noticias falsas contra la paz internacional*", "spreading false news against international peace" (article 115 of the Cuban Penal Code). This charge, which carries a maximum four-year sentence, can be applied to anyone who spreads false news with the aim of "putting in danger the prestige or credit of the Cuban State or its good relations with another State". The prosecutor had originally asked for a sentence of seven years for a charge of "*propaganda enemiga*", "enemy propaganda", but this request was modified to the lesser charge of one year for "spreading false news". However, three weeks after the trial the court judges fixed a sentence of two years. José González reportedly received this charge due to an article he wrote in August 2000 blaming police negligence for the death of Yohana González Herrera, national coordinator of the CTDC, who was said to have been killed by her ex-husband, despite repeated requests to have him arrested for beating and threatening her. The article appeared on the internet on the website of "Cuba Free Press", a Miami based press agency, and was aired on Radio Martí, a Miami based radio station funded by the US Government.

The prosecution reportedly accused José González of belonging to a "counter-revolutionary" group, mixing with those who are against the revolutionary process, and sending anti-government information to radio stations in Miami, USA. They also stated that he sent the article about police negligence with the intention of provoking discontent and public disorder.

José González, who is aged 48, is imprisoned in the *Combinado del Este* Prison in Havana. He is reportedly suffering from weight loss, frequent headaches, nose bleeds, raised blood pressure and insomnia. In February 2001 he reportedly carried out a hunger strike demanding the release of political prisoners (see *Medical Action*, AMR 25/004/2001, 15 May 2001).

José González has been detained on numerous occasions in the past for short periods.

Background Information

Although the number of political prisoners in Cuba may have decreased in recent years, Amnesty International remains concerned about the number of critics of the Cuban Government who continue to be detained, harassed and threatened because of their peaceful attempts to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Over the past years dozens of members of unofficial groups, including human rights defenders and journalists, have been detained for short periods and threatened with being brought to trial if they do not give up their activities or go into exile. In some cases trials have taken place and sentences issued. Trials in political cases often fall short of international fair trial standards, particularly with regard to access to defence counsel. In addition, lawyers, who are all employed by the Cuban State, are often reluctant to seriously challenge the arguments put forward by the prosecutors and the Department of State Security, the security service usually responsible for investigating cases of a political nature.

Please send faxes/express and airmail letters preferably in Spanish. If not, in English or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of **José Orlando González Bridón**, on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for his attempts to peacefully exercise his right to freedom of association and expression.
- Urging that all Cuban citizens be guaranteed their rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that the Cuban Government immediately cease to imprison, force into exile abroad or otherwise punish those who attempt to peacefully exercise such rights.

Please send appeals to:

Head of State and Government

Dr Fidel Castro Ruz

Presidente de los Consejos
de Estados y de Ministros

La Habana, Cuba

Telex and Fax: via Ministry of Foreign Affairs +53.7.333 085 / 335 261

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

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba

Telex: 511456 fisge

Fax: + 53 7 - 570 795/ 669 485

Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr Felipe Pérez Roque

Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Calzada No. 360
Vedado, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba
Telex: 511122 / 511464 / 512950 **Fax: +53.7.333 085 / 335 261/ 333 460**
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

This document is sent to CARRAN coordinators for action by groups. It is also being sent to sections. Please check with the Caribbean Sub-Regional Team if sending appeals after 31 December 2001.

KEYWORDS: PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE1 / FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION /
POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CRIMINAL CHARGES / ILL-HEALTH

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X ODW, UNITED KINGDOM