

URGENT ACTION

CRITIC OF CUBAN GOVERNMENT DENIED EXIT VISA

Juan Juan Almeida, the son of a former leader of the 1959 Cuban revolution, has been refused permission to leave the country after he criticized the authorities. Amnesty International fears that the restrictions on his movement are a form of unnecessary punishment for exercising his freedom of expression and will continue to face harassment.

Juan Juan Almeida suffers from a form of arthritis, and for several years his doctors in Cuba referred him for medical treatment in Belgium. However, since 2003, Cuba's Department of Migration and Foreign Services have not granted Juan Juan Almeida the exit visa he needs to leave the country. In early 2009 the authorities in the USA, where his wife and daughter live, granted him a humanitarian visa so that he could seek treatment there. However, he is still prevented from leaving Cuba.

Juan Juan Almeida has reported several incidents of harassment by security forces. Most recently, between 20 and 24 September, Juan Juan Almeida claims that he was followed every time he left his house by state security personnel, travelling in three cars. When Juan Juan Almeida drove to a local police station to find out why he was being followed, the cars stopped following him.

Juan Juan Almeida is the son of Juan Almeida Bosque, a political leader who was one of the principal figures in the revolution which brought former Cuban leader Fidel Castro to power. However, since 2003 he has criticized the government in an online publication called *Mistura* and in his autobiography, published in Spain, in which he detailed the harassment he has faced.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to issue Juan Juan Almeida with an exit visa;
- Reminding the authorities that the right to freedom of movement is universally recognized under Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Cuba is a signatory;
- Expressing concern at the restrictions on freedom of movement that are being imposed on dissidents and independent journalist and urging the authorities to end such restrictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

Head of Department of Migration and Foreign Services

Teniente Coronel Mario Augusto López Expósito

Jefe del Departamento de Migración, Dirección de Inmigración y Extranjería 3 y 22 Miramar, La Habana, Cuba

Salutation: Señor Teniente Coronel

Interior Minister

General Abelardo Coloma Ibarra
Ministro del Interior y Prisiones
Ministerio del Interior, Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Cuba

Fax: +53 7 8333085 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

+1 2127791697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Head of State and Government

Raúl Castro Ruz

Presidente

La Habana, Cuba

Fax: +53 7 8333085 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

+1 2127791697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

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

Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Cuban government is using the denial of exit visas as a punitive measure against government critics and dissidents, who are regularly denied their right to leave Cuba. Anyone peacefully exercising freedom of expression, association and assembly and challenging the government risks being deprived of the right to freedom of movement.

Cubans wishing to travel abroad must obtain an exit visa called a *tarjeta blanca* (white card). On 11 October, Blogger Yoani Sánchez was barred from leaving Cuba to receive an international journalism award. She was also prevented from traveling to collect the 2008 Ortega y Gasset Prize for digital journalism. In 2005, representatives of a group formed by relatives and friends of the 75 people imprisoned in the March 2003 crackdown, the *Damas de Blanco* (Ladies in White), were not allowed to travel to receive the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, one of the leaders of the Varela Project, was awarded the Sakharov prize in 2002 and was not allowed to travel to Strasbourg to receive it.

UA: 280/09 Index: AMR 25/010/2009 Issue Date: 16 October 2009

