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## **Cuba: New arrests follow government crackdowns on peaceful government critics**

The detention of five leading critics of the Cuban government in Havana yesterday represents a new crackdown on peaceful dissent, Amnesty International said today, as it called for their immediate and unconditional release.

“These latest arrests clearly demonstrate the government’s intolerance of any form of dissent in the run-up to the Fifth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, to be held later this year,” the organization said. “These people have been detained simply for criticising official government literature and as such are prisoners of conscience.”

Four of the people detained are members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, the Internal Dissidents’ Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation.

On 27 June the detainees held a press conference for foreign journalists during which they criticized an official discussion document entitled *El Partido de la Unidad, la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos que Defendemos*, *The Party of Unity, Democracy and the Human Rights We Defend*, which is being circulated within the country as a prelude to the Communist Party Congress. They also presented the journalists with their own analysis of the document entitled *La patria es de todos*, *The Homeland is for Everyone*. Immediately afterwards some 40 members of several unofficial groups who have formed a support committee for the Internal Dissidents’ Working Group were reportedly detained but all were released within hours or days.

On 3 July Vladimiro Roca Antunes, a member of the Working Group as well as the unofficial *Partido Social Demócrata Cubano*, Cuban Social Democratic Party, had reported that State Security officials had thrown stones at his home during the previous night and broken two windows. Two weeks later, in the early hours of 16 July, State Security officials reportedly went to his home and carried out a search lasting several hours. A large number of documents and a computer were reportedly confiscated. Roca himself was taken to the State Security headquarters at Villa Marista.

The other three members of the Working Group -- who were detained in similar circumstances and are also said to be in Villa Marista -- are: María Beatriz Roque Cabello, also of the unofficial *Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes*, Cuban Institute of Independent Economists, René Gómez Manzano, a lawyer belonging to an unofficial lawyers’ group called the *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, and Felix A. Bonne Carcasés, of the unofficial *Corriente Cívica Cubana*, Cuban Civic Current.

Journalist Luis López Prendes, of the independent press agency, *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba (BPIC)*, Cuban Independent Press Bureau, was also reportedly detained yesterday morning in Havana though no further details are so far available and it is not yet clear whether his detention is connected to those of the Working Group members.

BPIC journalist Lorenzo Páez Núñez was arrested on 10 July in Artemisa. Following a summary trial the next day, he was sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment for “disrespect” and

“defamation” because of reports he had given to contacts abroad about alleged human rights violations.

### **Background**

These arrests come in the wake of an increasing number of reports over the past two or three months of detentions and other types of harassment directed at members of unofficial groups of different kinds.

Prisoner of conscience Ana María Agramonte, the President of the unofficial *Movimiento Acción Nacional*, National Action Movement, was sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment on 16 May 1997 for “disrespect” and “resisting authority”. Journalist Héctor Peraza Linares, of the independent press agency *Habana Press*, Havana Press, is still in detention following his arrest on 23 June 1997 in Pinar del Río. The authorities have not made public the reasons for his arrest. Another Havana Press journalist, Joaquín Torres Álvarez, was assaulted outside his Havana home on 31 May 1997 by four individuals believed to be local Communist Party members or State Security officials.

In February 1996 the Cuban authorities rounded up dozens of members of unofficial groups belonging to a broad-based umbrella group known as *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Council, and prevented them from holding a national meeting. Several of its most prominent leaders were charged and imprisoned though all have since been released on expiry of their sentences. However, Héctor Palacio Ruiz, a member of the coordinating council of *Concilio Cubano*, was arrested on 9 January 1997, reportedly on a charge of “disrespect”, and has still not been brought to trial.

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