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Cuban journalist named prisoner of conscience

Authorities in Cuba must immediately release Cuban journalist Calixto Martínez, currently imprisoned for reporting on issues seen by the authorities as “controversial”, said Amnesty International today as it named him a prisoner of conscience.

Calixto Martínez, journalist with the unofficial news agency Hablemos Press, was arrested by the Cuban Revolutionary Police on 16 September 2012 near Havana airport.

He was investigating allegations that medicine provided by the World Health Organization to fight a cholera outbreak was being kept at the airport, as the Cuban government were allegedly trying to downplay the seriousness of the outbreak.

While at the airport he telephoned his colleagues at Hablemos Press to inform them that he had taken photographs and had interviewed airport workers. He was arrested shortly after.

When he asked the reason for his arrest the police told him they were just following an order.

Even though he was not formally charged or faced court, the police are reportedly accusing him with “disrespect” towards President Raúl Castro and his brother Fidel.

The Cuban state maintains a total monopoly on all media in the country, including television, radio, the press, internet service providers, and other electronic means of communication.

“The imprisonment of Calixto Martínez goes to show that authorities in Cuba are far from accepting that journalists have a role to play in society, including by investigating possible wrongdoings,” said Guadalupe Marengo, Deputy Director of the Americas programme at Amnesty International.

Prior to his September arrest, Martínez had been detained without charge on several occasions in 2012, always in relation to his work as a journalist.

There are currently 2 prisoners of conscience in Cuba.