

AI Index: PRE 01/458/2013
11 September 2013

Cuba must immediately release prisoner of conscience

Authorities in Cuba must immediately and unconditionally release a political activist imprisoned solely because of his political views, Amnesty International said as it adopted Iván Fernández Depestre a “Prisoner of Conscience”.

The 40 year-old political activist, was arrested on 30 July in the central province of Santa Clara as he peacefully participated in a public event to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Cuban national hero Frank País.

“Iván Fernández Depestre is being held only because he holds opinions contrary to those of the Cuban authorities. He must be released immediately and unconditionally,” said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor for Amnesty International.

Mr Depestre was charged with “dangerousness”, a pre-emptive measure defined as the “special proclivity of a person to commit crimes” after he was accused of “meeting with antisocial persons”. He had no access to a lawyer during his trial and was sentenced to three years in jail on 2 August. He is currently on hunger strike.

“The Cuban authorities seem to be using every trick in the book to punish those who dare to speak up about human rights. They are even using a law that punishes potential offences on account of ‘antisocial behaviour’ to imprison political dissidents, independent journalists and government critics,” said Javier Zúñiga.

“It is a sad reflection of the state of the rule of law in Cuba, when people are convicted to prison terms not for what they have done but for what they might do.”

On 4 September, local activists were arrested after they went to meet Mr Depestre at the Guamajal prison. They were later released.

Articles 78 to 84 of the Cuban Criminal Code established that those convicted of “special proclivity to commit crimes” can be sentenced to between one and four years of re-education in “specialized work or study establishments” or sent to “a work collective”