

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 25/019/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 217
9 August 2005

Cuba: No dissent allowed

Fifteen people remain in detention following a recent government crackdown on dissidence on 13 and 22 July. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be subjected to harsh or disproportionate prison sentences solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

On 13 and 22 July, the Cuban authorities reportedly detained more than 50 people, including journalists and political activists who were organizing or participating in demonstrations.

While most of the dissidents were released without charge, at least 15 men remain in prison and are reportedly facing charges of "public disorder" or criminal charges under the *Law for the Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba*, also known as Law 88.

On 13 July at least two dozen dissidents were apparently detained in Havana by Cuban police whilst participating in a peaceful memorial for the victims of the "13 de Marzo" tugboat disaster of 1994 in which some 35 people, including children, died when the vessel in which they were attempting to flee Cuba sank after reportedly being rammed by three other vessels, apparently acting under official instructions (see AMR 25/13/97 for more information).

On 22 July around 30 people were arrested as they tried to participate in an anti-government demonstration outside the French Embassy. Nine of them remain in detention and to Amnesty International's knowledge some may face up to 20 years in prison if they are tried and sentenced under Law 88.

The Cuban authorities continue to suppress any form of dissent by methods such as harassment, threats, intimidation, detention and long-term imprisonment. Amnesty International has received many reports that trials for politically motivated offences or charges frequently fail to meet international fair trial standards.

Amnesty International condemns detention solely for the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and considers such detainees to be prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International calls on the Cuban authorities:

- to release all prisoners of conscience;
- to bring charges against those still in detention or release them;
- to ensure that they are given a fair trial in compliance with international standards;
- to refrain from the use of criminal law in such a way as to stifle criticism of state authorities or government policies, or to intimidate those who voice peaceful dissent;
- to ensure that peaceful demonstrators are not imprisoned and harassed simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association;

to reform laws, regulations and administrative practices relating to freedom of expression, association and assembly in accordance with international standards.