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CUBA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HOPES PRISONER RELEASES WILL BE FOLLOWED BY FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS REFORMS

Amnesty International welcomes the apparent unconditional release this week of six prisoners of conscience by the Cuban authorities, hoping they will be followed by fundamental human rights reforms in the island.

At least four of the prisoners released were on a list of political prisoners handed to the Cuban Government by the French human rights group France Libertés, who visited the country recently on a joint delegation with three other organizations.

The men -- all of them prisoners of conscience whose cases Amnesty International has been working on for several years -- are:

- Indamiro Restano Díaz, President of the unofficial political group *Movimiento de Armonía* (MAR), Harmony movement, arrested in 1991 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for "rebellion";
- Sebastián Arcos Bergnes, Secretary-General of the unofficial *Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos*, Cuban Committee for Human Rights, arrested in 1991 and sentenced to four years eight months' imprisonment for "enemy propaganda";
- Pedro Castillo Ferrer, a teacher arrested in 1992 and sentenced to five years six months' imprisonment for "enemy propaganda";
- Agustín Figueredo Figueredo, who has been in prison since at least 1990 serving a twelve-year sentence, also for "enemy propaganda".

Upon release, Indamiro Restano reportedly informed journalists the authorities had told him that his organization would be "respected" in the future. Restano also said he felt it was the beginning of a new era of tolerance.

"Amnesty International hopes that this is indeed the case, and that the releases and the invitation to France-Libertés to visit Cuba -- as well as that issued last year to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which took place in November 1994 -- herald a fundamental review of human rights practices in Cuba," the organization said today.

According to Amnesty International, there are at least six hundred prisoners of conscience serving sentences in Cuba -- where the Communist Party is the only one permitted and unofficial opposition or human rights groups face constant harassment.

Trials of all political prisoners in Cuba fall far short of international standards for a fair trial, in particular with regard to the right to adequate defence. "We are also concerned about

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occasional reports of serious ill-treatment in prisons and police stations, as well as the continuing use of the death penalty, mainly in criminal cases," the human rights organization said today. "But we hope the recent release of prisoners will not be an isolated step forward, and will be followed by improvements in those areas as well," Amnesty International says.

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