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10 years on from crackdown on dissidence, fundamental freedoms still lacking in Cuba

On 18 March 2003, a group of 75 political dissidents were detained across Cuba in an unprecedented crackdown on spurious charges related to state security and, following summary trials, they were sentenced to long prison terms of up to 28 years.

They were subsequently declared prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International as they had been imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of fundamental freedoms.

In July 2010, following the intervention of the Cuban Catholic Church, the Cuban authorities agreed to release those of the 75 who remained in prison. However, the majority of them were forced into exile in Spain.

Those who refused to leave Cuba were kept in prison until early 2011. Although they were allowed to remain on the island their release was conditional - their prison sentences hang over them even though they are no longer confined.

Their release has not heralded a change in human rights policy in Cuba. The authorities remain determined to contain government critics with new tactics, including intimidation, harassment, multiple short-term detentions and restrictions on movement to stop them from carrying out their activities or as retaliation.

In spite of recent changes to the migration law which makes travel abroad easier for Cubans, the Cuban government continues to maintain a swathe of laws aimed at preventing political dissidents and human rights defenders from exercising their freedom of expression, association and assembly

Amnesty International has been monitoring the human rights situation in Cuba for decades. Experts from the organization are available to comment on the 10th anniversary of the crackdown and the current human rights situation on the island. We can also facilitate contact with former Cuban prisoners of conscience who were detained in March 2003's crackdown on political dissidence.

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