

**EXTERNAL**

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**Cuba**  
**Briefing on the trial of 4 prisoners of conscience**

Prisoners of conscience Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, René Gómez Manzano and Felix A. Bonne Carcasés - all members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, the Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, were tried on 1 March 1999, but their sentence has not yet been announced.

Amnesty International believes that the four have been imprisoned for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience.

They were all detained on 16 July 1997, but it was not until 23 September 1998 that they were charged with '*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*', 'other acts against state security' (Article 125 (c) of the Cuban Penal Code) in relation to a charge of '*sedición*', 'sedition' (Art 100 (c) of the Cuban Penal Code).

The four group members were arrested following a press conference attended by foreign journalists in June 1997 during which they criticized an official discussion document -- "*El Partido de la Unidad, la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos que Defendemos*", "The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights which we Defend". They also gave journalists a copy of their own critique of the document entitled "*La Patria es de Todos*", "The Homeland is for Everyone".

According to a government statement, the trial is completed and is now awaiting sentence. It also stated that the prosecutor showed links between activities attributed to the accused and the different tactics used against Cuba by the US and claimed that their activities violated and encouraged the violation of laws and regulations of the Cuban state, especially those referring to foreign investments and were compatible with the Helms-Burton law and the toughening of the US economic blockade against Cuba.

The government statement also stated that these actions promoted and encouraged Cuban citizens not to vote in elections, which is compatible with the US campaigns against the island on this matter. For this type of crime, the law stipulates a sentence of up to eight years' imprisonment, although the prosecutor was requesting a six-year prison term for Roca and five-year prison terms for the others. The court reportedly has up to 12 working days to make public its conclusions.

Amnesty International has issued an Urgent Action today (Extra 31/99, AMR 25/11/99) asking for the immediate and unconditional release of the four prisoners. We have also expressed concern that approximately 100 dissidents were arrested over the last two

days, in what appears to have been an attempt to prevent them from carrying out their journalistic or human rights work or from attending the trial of the four dissidents. According to reports, most of the detainees have now been released, but it is not clear how many or who remain in detention.

On 16 February 1999 Cuba's National Assembly passed tough new legislation aimed at combatting political dissent, called the "*Ley de Protección de la Independencia Nacional y la Economía de Cuba*", "Law for the Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba". Under this new law, dissidents and journalists found to be working against the Cuban state reportedly face up to 20 years in jail and huge fines.

The law calls for seven to 15 years' imprisonment for passing information to the United States that could be used to bolster anti-Cuban measures such as the US economic blockade of the island, rising to 20 years if the information is acquired surreptitiously. The legislation also bans the ownership, distribution or reproduction of subversive materials from the US government, and proposes jail terms of up to 8 years for collaborating with radio and TV stations and publications deemed to be assisting US policy.

The media in Cuba is state-controlled and freedom of expression, association and assembly is severely limited. Many journalists working for independent agencies have faced harassment, being detained for short periods, threatened with detention if they continue their work, or asked to leave the country. Others have been charged or sentenced and have become prisoners of conscience (for further information, you can see EXTRA 14/99, AMR 25/02/99).

For further information on the cases of the four prisoners please see external documents: AMR 25/16/98 and AMR 25/24/98; and UA 221/97, AMR 25/20/97, and follow-ups AMR 25/21/97, AMR 25/23/97).

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