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Prisoners of conscience/Health concern

23 September 1999

CUBA

Marcel VALENZUELA SALT, political activist
Marlon CABRERA, political activist

Opposition activists Marcel Valenzuela Salt and Marlon Cabrera were arrested on 14 September 1999. Under harsh new legislation aimed at silencing dissent, they could face up to 20 years in prison. Amnesty International is concerned that they have been detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and considers them prisoners of conscience. They have begun a hunger strike, which they reportedly say they will continue until they are released.

The two men, both members of the illegal opposition group *Hermandad Cívica*, Civic Brotherhood, were arrested, along with five others, in the Butari Park in Havana where they were holding an informal class on civil disobedience. The detainees were all taken to a police station and then to the *Departamento Técnico de Investigaciones (DTI)*, Technical Investigations Department, in Havana. The other five, Oscar Elías Biscet González, Esteban Pérez Castillo, Joaquín Rafael Martínez Rodríguez, Alejandro Chang Castillo and journalist Angel Pablo Polanco, have all now been released, but Marcel Valenzuela Salt and Marlon Cabrera remain in detention at the DTI.

According to Oscar Elías Biscet González, who was arrested with them, Valenzuela and Cabrera shouted "Long live human rights!" as they were arrested and Valenzuela was hit in the face by a plain-clothes policeman. Marcel Valenzuela Salt has been arrested and briefly detained before, in July, August and September 1999.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In February 1999 Cuba's National Assembly passed tough new legislation (Law 88) aimed at combating 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 deemed to be working against the Cuban state reportedly face up to 20 years' imprisonment. 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, 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 terms of imprisonment of up to five years for collaborating with radio and TV stations and publications deemed to be assisting US policy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern at the recent arrest of Marcel Valenzuela Salt and Marlon Cabrera, and urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released, on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- urging that they be granted immediate access to lawyers of their choosing and any necessary medical assistance.

APPEALS TO:

1) Attorney-General

Dr Juan Escalona Reguera
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General de la República
San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba

Telexes: 511456 fisge

Faxes: + 53 7 57 07 95 (if voice answers, say 'me puede dar tono de fax, por favor'); + 53 7 66 94 85 (no need to aks for a fax tone)
Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

2) Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Felipe Pérez Roque
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Calzada No. 360, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: **Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba**
Telexes: 511122 / 511464 / 512950
Faxes: + 53 7 335261 / 33 3085 / 33 3460
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Minister of the Interior

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra
Ministro de Interior
Ministerio del Interior
Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: **Ministro Interior, Havana, Cuba**
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister
Faxes: + 53 7 335261

COPIES TO:

National Union of Jurists
Unión Nacional de Juristas
Apartado 4161
La Habana 4, Cuba

Editor of Granma (daily newspaper)
Sr Jacinto Granda de Laserna
Granma, Apdo 6260, La Habana, Cuba

and to diplomatic representatives of Cuba accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 October 1999.