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MEDICAL CONCERN

Further information on political prisoners in need of medical attention

CUBA

(See AMR 25/07/97, 28 May 1997)

In May 1997, Amnesty International issued a Medical Action, *Cuba: Political prisoners in need of medical attention*, AMR 25/07/97, giving details of a number of prisoners in need of medical attention and who were apparently not receiving necessary care. This action updates the 1997 publication, giving some new information, including details of the release of several of the prisoners mentioned in the previous action.

UPDATE ON PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Six of the seven prisoners of conscience mentioned in the May 1997 action have been released (see below). Amnesty International is continuing to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the other prisoner of conscience mentioned in the medical action, Jesús Chámber Ramírez, on the grounds that he is imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his political beliefs.

The following four prisoners of conscience were unconditionally released in February 1998 following the Pope's visit to Cuba (for further information on the Vatican's initiative regarding the release of prisoners please see p.3):

José Angel Carrasco Velar
Juan Carlos Castillo Pasto
Luis Gustavo Domínguez Gutiérrez
Adolfo Durán Figueredo

In addition, Dr Omar del Pozo Marrero was released on 6 April 1998 following the Vatican's initiative, on condition that he left the country. He is now in exile in Canada.

Roberto Mures Justiz was released in mid-1997. The exact date is not known to AI.

Jesús Chámber Ramírez (aged 35)

The seventh prisoner featured in the AI document of May 1997, Jesús Chámber Ramírez, was not included in the releases authorised by the Cuban Government following the Vatican's initiative. According to reports, in September 1997 he was transferred from Kilo 8 Prison in Camagüey province to Las Mangas Prison in Bayamo, Granma province. He has reportedly been held in solitary confinement several times and his mother has tried countless times since then to see him but has been refused. AI is reiterating its appeals for his unconditional release.

UPDATE ON OTHER POLITICAL PRISONERS

Three of the six prisoners mentioned in AMR 25/07/97 serving sentences for offences against state security, some or all of which appear to have been politically motivated, were released following the

Pope's visit to Cuba. Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the health of the other three who remain imprisoned.

- o Eduardo Gómez Sánchez was unconditionally released in February 1998.
- o Armando Alonso Romero was released on 6 April 1998 on condition that he left the country. He is now in exile in Canada.
- o José Miranda Acosta was released on 4 May 1998 on condition that he left the country. He is now in exile in Canada.

Other prisoners remaining in prison

Jorge Luis García Pérez (nicknamed "Antúnez") (aged 32)

Jorge Luis García Pérez remains in prison. In July 1997 he was transferred from Kilo 8 Prison, Camagüey province, to Combinado de Guantánamo Prison after threatening to go on hunger strike, together with other political prisoners, in protest at an international youth festival that was taking place in Havana.

According to reports, in September 1997 more than 30 prison guards at Combinado de Guantánamo Prison kicked and punched Jorge Luis García and two other prisoners while they were handcuffed. Jorge Luis García Pérez was beaten on the face, neck, abdomen, ribs and back (see *Cuba: Ill-treatment of Three Political Prisoners in Combinado de Guantánamo Prison*, AMR 25/44/97, 8 December 1997, for further information).

As of mid-October 1997, Jorge Luis García Pérez was reportedly being held in a punishment cell and deprived of medical treatment. In late 1997 Jorge Luis García Pérez was brought some medicine by his relatives. According to reports, the authorities withheld the medicine for several weeks in spite of the fact that he urgently needed them due to a hunger strike he had been on. He has also reportedly been threatened with being poisoned, thus causing him to fear eating the prison food.

According to a report of April 1998 he was suffering from high blood pressure and kidney problems [*hipertensión arterial y molestias renales*]. In order to receive any medical attention, he reportedly had to beat on his door and shout, until he was finally taken to the sick bay but barely received any treatment.

Alejandro Mustafá Reyes (aged 48)

Alejandro Mustafá Reyes continues to be held in detention. He was transferred from the *Prisión Especial de Máxima Severidad*, Special Maximum Severity Prison, known as Kilo 8, to Boniato Prison in Santiago de Cuba in mid-1997, reportedly after threatening to go on hunger strike, together with other political prisoners, in protest at an international youth festival that was taking place in Havana. In October 1997 he was reportedly transferred to *Versalles*, State Security headquarters in Santiago de Cuba province to await transfer to another prison as punishment for declaring that he was to go on a hunger strike. According to a report of October 1997, he was at that time suffering from high temperature, pains in the abdomen and vomiting.

Cecilio Reynoso Sánchez (aged 56)

There is no new information about Cecilio Reynoso Sánchez. He is believed to be still imprisoned at the *Prisión Provincial de Pinar del Río*, Pinar del Río Provincial Prison, known as Kilo 5½, Pinar del Río province.

Background information on the release of prisoners following the Pope's visit to Cuba

Prior to Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in January 1998, AI presented a comprehensive package of its concerns in Cuba to the Vatican Foreign Minister, Cardinal Sodano, and requested the Vatican to do whatever it could to raise such concerns and in particular to seek the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience (POCs).

A list was handed over to the Cuban authorities by Cardinal Sodano, including sick prisoners, long-term prisoners, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Following the Pope's visit, thirteen prisoners of conscience on whose behalf Amnesty International had been actively campaigning were among the approximately 300 political and common prisoners who were pardoned by the Council of State. A further 17 went into forced exile in Canada in April and May 1998 (six of those exiled in Canada were AI prisoners of conscience). Seventy political prisoners who were on the Vatican's list were not released on the grounds that they still posed a threat to national security or public safety. These 70 prisoners are believed to include some of those on whose behalf AI has campaigned.

There is still little concrete proof of a significant change in Cuban Government policy on dissent -- at least 300 political prisoners, including several dozen prisoners of conscience, are believed to remain in prison and trials of dissidents are continuing. Amnesty International continues to monitor the situation and to investigate allegations of human rights violations.

Recommended Actions

Please continue to send appeals for the four remaining prisoners mentioned above -- *Jesús Chámber Ramírez, Jorge Luis García Pérez (nicknamed "Antúnez"), Alejandro Mustafá Reyes, Cecilio Reynoso Sánchez.*

Letters, written in Spanish or your own language, should urge

- *That the prisoners be given access at all times to levels of nutrition, medical care and hygiene in keeping with the standards available to the general population. Shortages of supplies cannot be used as an excuse for prisoners not being permitted access to medical staff or advice on alternative forms of care.*
- *That conditions of detention should conform to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.*
- *That no prisoner should be punished, ill-treated or prejudiced in any way for having requested adequate medical care or nutrition or for complaining about their conditions. If necessary, they should be transferred to civilian hospitals for appropriate treatment.*
- *That prisoners be held within reasonable travelling distance of their homes so that their relatives are able to regularly bring them necessary medicines and additional food.*

You could also urge the release of *Jesús Chámber Ramírez* who is a prisoner of conscience.

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