

CUBA Joaquín TORRES ALVAREZ, aged 44, journalist

---

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Joaquín Torres Álvarez, director of the independent news agency, *Habana Press*, following reports that he was assaulted by individuals believed to be working for the Department of State Security.

According to reports, on 31 May 1997 Joaquín Torres was standing at the door of his home in Havana with José Orlando González Bridon, president of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba*, Democratic Workers' Union, an unofficial trade union, when he was assaulted by at least four people whom he recognized as being local Communist Party members or State Security officials. The assailants punched him repeatedly and verbally abused him before neighbours were able to intervene and help him to take refuge in his house. Joaquín Torres afterwards made a formal complaint to the police concerning the attack. He also obtained a medical certificate indicating that he had received bruises and scratches to several parts of his body.

Joaquín Torres was reportedly arrested on six occasions during 1996 in connection with his journalistic activities. In February 1997 he was warned by State Security that he would be imprisoned if he did not cease his activities or leave the country. His predecessor at *Habana Press* and the agency's founder, Rafael Solano, was forced into exile in 1996 after being threatened with imprisonment (see *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile*, AI Index AMR 25/29/96, July 1996).

Although threats of violence have been made to dissidents, including journalists, on several occasions, few such threats have been carried out so far. Amnesty International is therefore concerned about this attack on Joaquín Torres and believes that it is a further attempt to force him to cease his activities or to force him into exile. On 14 January 1997 Nicolás Rosario Rosabal, a journalist working for the *Asociación de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba (APIC)*, Cuban Association of Independent Journalists, was reportedly assaulted at a bus station by two individuals believed to be working for State Security. In February 1997, several journalists working for independent organizations were subjected to "*actos de repudio*", "acts of repudiation" - these are meetings or demonstrations organized by government officials or mass organizations supporting the government at which the person or persons concerned are subjected to criticism and abuse, sometimes physical, because of their so-called "counter-revolutionary" views or activities.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

All media in Cuba are state-controlled and freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited. Over the past few years, a number of non-governmental organizations, involving political and human rights activists, independent journalists and trade unionists, economists, lawyers and others, have been formed. However, none has been granted official permission to operate even when they have made the appropriate application to the Ministry of Justice for recognition (their requests usually go unanswered).

In 1995 the Cuban Government began a major crackdown on dissidents, following the formation of *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Concilium, a coalition made up of over 100 unofficial groups, including human rights groups, independent professional

associations and political parties. Since then members of *Concilio Cubano* and journalists working for independent organization have been subjected to persistent harassment and frequent short-term detention. They have also been threatened with long-term imprisonment and occasionally physical violence if they do not cease their activities or leave the country. A few have been brought to trial and imprisoned as prisoners of conscience.

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

- expressing concern at reports that journalist Joaquín Torres Álvarez was attacked at his home by persons believed to be acting on the instructions of the Department of State Security;
- calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into the incident and for those found responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging that steps be taken to guarantee the physical integrity of Joaquín Torres Álvarez;
- urging that members of *Habana Press* and other freelance journalists be permitted to carry out their legitimate peaceful activities without interference from the authorities.

**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**

**Telex: 511456 fidge**

**Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General**

2) Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr Roberto Robaina González  
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Calzada No. 360  
Vedado, La Habana, Cuba  
**Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba**

**Telex: 511122 / 511464 / 512950**

**Fax: + 53 7 333085 / + 53 7 335261**

**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**

4) Department of State Security

Sr Director  
Departamento de Seguridad del Estado  
Villa Marista  
La Víbora

La Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Director, Villa Marista, Havana, Cuba**

**Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Cuban Journalists Union (official body)

Unión de Periodistas de Cuba

Calle 23 No. 452

Apartado 6646

Vedado, Havana

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 14 July 1997.