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Cuba: Amnesty International fears further arrests as jailed government critics face the risk of heavy prison sentences

Even more government critics could face imminent arrest for their peaceful activities, Amnesty International said today as four activists already in detention face the prospect of heavy prison sentences.

“We have received reports that at least a dozen other activists have been threatened with long prison terms if they do not stop their peaceful political activities,” the human rights organization said. “We also believe that the Cuban authorities are deliberately trying to discredit peaceful opposition groups by falsely linking them to terrorist activities.”

Among those who have been threatened with heavy prison sentences are former prisoner of conscience and lawyer, Dr Leonel Morejón Almagro, and 11 other political activists belonging to different unofficial groups, who on 14 July presented a document entitled *Declaración de la Alianza Nacional Cubana*, Declaration of the Cuban National Alliance, to the Council of State and the National Assembly of Popular Power.

The document requested the authorities to organize a national referendum to reform the Cuban Constitution to permit freedom of thought and association, pluralism and direct elections by secret ballot. Since then, all 12 signatories of the declaration have reportedly been visited in their homes by State Security officials and warned that they could face long prison terms, in the case of Dr Morejón for as much as 25 years.

The homes of at least two of them have been searched and Amnesty International is currently investigating reports that one of the signatories, Aguileo Cancio Chong, is being detained at Villa Marista, the Havana State Security headquarters, and may face charges.

“We are also concerned that the four political dissidents arrested on 16 July will not have a fair trial and may face lengthy prison sentences,” Amnesty International said. “We are continuing to seek their immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience.”

The Cuban authorities reportedly told foreign diplomats that the four were arrested because they had carried out activities “aimed at subverting the judicial and constitutional order of the Republic of Cuba”; that they were seeking to disrupt local government elections; that they had released “false and inexact data” about the Cuban economy; and that they had the logistical support of US diplomats in Havana.

The Cuban government also alleged that it had proof that they were working with “leaders of terrorist groups based in the United States” and that such groups were behind two small bomb explosions at hotels in Havana on 13 July.

The four – Vladimiro Roca Antunes, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, René Gómez Manzano and Félix A. Bonnó 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 -- have been held since their arrest at the Havana State Security headquarters.

On 24 July a lawyer representing Vladimiro Roca Antunes was able to visit him and was reportedly told by State Security officials that all four were under investigation for "*enemy propaganda*", which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years' imprisonment if the mass media are used for such purposes. However, it is believed that other serious charges may also be under consideration.

Amnesty International fears that the four may be subjected to psychological pressures to sign incriminating statements while in pre-trial detention and that they may be under pressure to accept exile abroad rather than face imprisonment.

"The arrest of the four is motivated solely by their calls for peaceful political change in Cuba," Amnesty International said. "In the absence of press freedom and independent non-governmental organizations, they have had no option but to express their views to foreign journalists or through other channels based outside of Cuba. To the organization's knowledge, they have at no point used or advocated violence."
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