

AI INDEX: AMR 25/16 /95
6 NOVEMBER 1995

CUBA: AUTHORITIES REFUSE VISAS TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International today expressed its disappointment at the refusal of the Cuban authorities to grant visas to four delegates of the organization to attend a conference starting today in Havana, despite having been invited by the Cuban Attorney General's Office, *Fiscalía General de la República*.

The Cuban authorities told the delegates that they could travel to Cuba only as individuals with tourist visas and not as delegates of Amnesty International.

In August 1995, the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London received an invitation to attend the First International Meeting on the Legal Protection of Citizen's Rights, *Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre Protección de los Derechos Ciudadanos*, sponsored by the Cuban Attorney General's Office and to be held in Havana from 6 to 10 November.

In the past, representatives of Amnesty International visited Cuba in three occasions: 1977, 1988 and 1990. During the 1988 visit, the delegation met government officials and representatives of the civil society, visited prisons and interviewed prisoners. In 1990, Amnesty International delegates to the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in Havana also met government officials and members of the civil society.

However, in 1993 the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs did not agree to a further visit requested by the human rights organization. In May 1995, Amnesty International sent to President Fidel Castro a new request for a visit. No response to this request has been received so far.

Amnesty International believes that there are at least 600 prisoners of conscience in Cuba, imprisoned solely because of the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, or for trying to leave the country.

According to the organization, members of unofficial political and human rights organizations are subject to frequent short-term arrest and intimidation to force them to give up their activities. Trials in all political cases fall short of international standards.

Amnesty International continues to receive frequent reports of prisoners being beaten by guards in the prisons, despite the ratification of United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by the Cuban government in May 1995.

In Cuba, the death penalty, one of Amnesty International's major concerns, is still applicable for a wide range of criminal offences and is occasionally imposed. According to the organization, two executions are known to have taken place in 1995.

ENDS\