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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 181/94

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TO: PRESS OFFICERS  
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE  
DATE: 11 AUGUST 1994

AI INDEX: NWS 11/181/94  
DISTR: SC/PO

NO OF WORDS:1113

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - CUBA (As well as the news item, there is also enclosed a background sheet on Cuba which can be used externally.)

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Indian government has now issued two responses to our report embargoed for 16 August, which has meant that the final version of the news service item has been delayed. Apologies for this, we will try and get the item to you by late Friday or early Monday.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

India - 16 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 175/94

Kosovo - 19 September - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Thailand - 18 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 176/94

Bhutan/Nepal - 25 August - See news service 168/94

Brazil - 14 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Togo - 15 September - See news service 168/94

Indonesia - 28 September - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

**\*\* Turkey - 14 October \*\*** - Targeted news service item on Turkey death penalty action. Will be sent to Turkish media only from IS.

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**CUBA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF PEACEFUL GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS**

Amnesty International is concerned for the human rights of peaceful government opponents and human rights activists in Cuba following violent clashes between pro-government supporters and protesters in Havana last week.

Last Friday, crowds hoping to hi-jack boats to take them to the USA gathered along the Havana seafront. They reportedly attacked the security forces with sticks and stones and shouted anti-government slogans when it became clear that they were not going to be able to leave the country. Police reportedly fired repeatedly into the air to disperse the crowd.

Similar incidents were also reported in other parts of the city where special armed troops were said to have been called in.

This week, Cuban television reported that 295 people had so far been charged in connection with the disturbances. The television report showed large numbers of detainees being held in some kind of prison complex but it was not clear where. Unofficial sources believe that the number of those in detention may be nearer 500.

Amnesty International is concerned that the authorities have reportedly used these events as a pretext to unjustly detain so-called "counter-revolutionaries". The human rights organization has received reports of 19 political and human rights activists who were rounded up at the weekend, including recently released prisoner of conscience Fernando Velazquez Medina and his wife Xiomara Gonzalez. It is not clear where they are being held.

At least four of these detainees are members of the **Consejo Nacional por los derechos civiles en Cuba** (National Council for Civil Rights in Cuba), a group documenting cases of people who have reportedly drowned or gone missing during attempts to leave Cuba illegally. The president of this council was arrested in May.

Amnesty International considers all 19 of these detainees to be prisoners of conscience targeted solely because of their known anti-government sympathies and is urging the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally.

"We acknowledge that the Cuban authorities have to maintain law and order and have a duty to arrest those involved in violent activities, but peaceful government opponents and human rights defenders should be allowed to carry out their legitimate activities without interference," Amnesty International said today.

The unrest followed three incidents between 26 July and 4 August, in which groups of people, in some cases armed, hi-jacked ferries in the Havana area to divert them to the United States. One policeman was reportedly killed during one incident after being attacked and pushed into the water, another is missing believed drowned.

Cuban authorities have arrested one man suspected of being responsible for the killing of one of the policeman. He is likely to face the death penalty if convicted of murder. Others involved in the hi-jackings were also reportedly in detention.

All those arrested in connection with last week's Havana seafront disturbances or for attempting to leave the country illegally should be immediately released unless charged with a recognizable criminal offence, according to Amnesty International.

The organization is also calling for all those still in detention, including anyone charged with a capital offence, to be granted full judicial guarantees in accordance with international standards.

**Amnesty International also fears that pro-government supporters are in effect being given carte blanche to carry out attacks on demonstrators and suspected dissidents by any means at their disposal.**

**President Castro has said that these civilian supporters should not use firearms.**

**In response to the unrest, the authorities mobilised large numbers of supporters, many reportedly armed with sticks and metal tubing. They reportedly attacked the demonstrators, as well as anyone who did not appear to support the government.**

**Among those supporters mobilized were the government founded **Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida** (Rapid Response Brigades), which have frequently been involved in the serious harassment and intimidation of dissidents, sometimes resulting in physical injury. Participation in the Brigades is supposed to be voluntary, but some people have reportedly been coerced into participating.**

**"The Cuban Government should immediately disband the Rapid Response Brigades or bring them under the direct supervision of law enforcement officials and strictly regulate them by law," Amnesty International said.**

**ENDS\**

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**EXTERNAL BACKGROUND SHEET ON CUBA**

**Cuba's seriously deteriorating economic situation is driving certain sections of the population to try to flee, by whatever means possible, to the USA. This has led to an ongoing propaganda war between Cuba and the USA over the plight of such people.**

**The Cuban authorities say they will issue exit visas to anyone who wishes to leave the country as long as they have US visas. Nevertheless, many either cannot afford to do so or are unable to obtain visas or exit permits for various reasons. All Cubans who reach the USA are either granted political asylum or are given permission to remain there under the terms of the Cuban Adjustment Act while those who seek asylum or visas at the US Interests Section in Havana often have their applications turned down. The Cuban authorities therefore argue that the US is in fact encouraging people to take to the seas.**

**Following the latest incidents, President Castro has threatened to order the Cuban coastguard to no longer prevent people from leaving Cuba by boat and to stop impeding boats arriving from Miami to pick up people to take back to the US.**

**As the result of a similar action in 1980, some 125,000 Cubans reached the USA in what became known as the Mariel exodus. The US authorities have said they would not allow a repeat of Mariel.**

**ENDS\**