
amnesty international

CUBA

**Some releases but repression
and imprisonment continue**



**15 February 1999
AI Index: AMR 25/05/99
Distr: SC/CO/GR**

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Some releases but repression and imprisonment continue

One year has passed since the issue of *Cuba: New Cases of Prisoners of Conscience and Possible Prisoners of Conscience*, AMR 25/01/98, January 1998, and the visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II to Cuba in January 1998. This document serves as an update to that document and gives the latest information on prisoners of conscience detained since January 1997. It also gives some details of recent short-term detentions and harassment.

Following the visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II in January 1998, nearly 300 prisoners were released including 101 political prisoners, 19 of whom had been adopted by AI as prisoners of conscience. Thirteen of the prisoners of conscience were unconditionally released in February: **Arturo Betancourt Stephenson, José Angel Carrasco Velar, Juan Carlos Castillo Pasto, Moisés Raúl Cintra Pacheco, Luis Gustavo Domínguez Gutiérrez, Adolfo Durán Figueredo, Pascual Escalona Naranjo, José Antonio Frandín Cribé, Osmel Lugo Gutiérrez, Alexis Maestre Saborit, Nelson Facundo Mújica Pérez, Héctor Palacio Ruiz and Angel Luis Valiente Laugart.** The other six prisoners of conscience were amongst 17 political prisoners released in April and May 1998 on condition that they went into exile in Canada: **Alberto Aguilera Guevara, Omar del Pozo Marrero, Adriano González Marichal, Víctor Reinaldo Infante Estrada, René Portelles Hernández and Guillermo Samba Ferrandiz,** and one possible prisoner of conscience, **José Miranda Acosta.**

Although the number of political prisoners in Cuba may have decreased and fewer new sentences were issued during 1998 than the previous year, Amnesty International remains concerned about the number of critics of the Cuban Government who continue to be detained, harassed and threatened because of their peaceful attempts to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Over the past year, and particularly in recent months, dozens of members of unofficial groups, including human rights defenders and journalists, have been detained for short periods and threatened with being brought to trial if they do not give up their activities or go into exile. A handful have been convicted and some are still awaiting trial. Trials in political cases continue to fall short of international fair trial standards, particularly with regard to access to defence counsel. Defendants in cases heard by municipal courts, often only hours or days after arrest, sometimes have no legal representation whilst detainees held under investigation on state security charges often have only very limited access to lawyers while in pre-trial detention at police stations or at State Security headquarters. Detainees are sometimes subjected to psychological pressures, such as solitary confinement, long intense interrogations, threats and insults.

Amnesty International believes that there are currently at least 350 political prisoners, including some 100 prisoners of conscience serving sentences in Cuban prisons. However, since the authorities do not publicise information on the prison population and since human rights monitoring is severely limited, it is impossible to give a precise figure.

CURRENT PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE (only those detained after January 1997)

Amnesty International believes that the following eighteen people are prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their peaceful attempts to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release:

Reinaldo Alfaro García, vice-president of the unofficial *Asociación de Lucha Frente a la Injusticia (ALFIN)*, Association for Struggle against Injustice, and a member of the executive of the unofficial *Partido Solidaridad Democrático (PSD)*, Democratic Solidarity Party, is currently serving a three year sentence in Combinado Sur de Matanzas Prison, Matanzas province. He was detained on 8 May 1997 a few hours after ALFIN had convened the mothers of political prisoners to appear before the National Assembly and the day before he and some of the mothers were to hand over a request for an amnesty for their sons to the President of the National Assembly of Popular Power. Just before his detention Reinaldo Alfaro reportedly spoke personally about the letter on a US-based radio station that broadcasts to Cuba and is known to be monitored by the Cuban authorities, calling on the mothers of political prisoners to gather outside the National Assembly. His call was reportedly broadcast several times in one day.

On 28 August 1998 Reinaldo Alfaro García was convicted and sentenced to three years' imprisonment, charged with "*difusión de noticias falsas contra la paz internacional*", "spreading false news against international peace" (article 115 of the Cuban Penal Code), reportedly because of a denunciation that he made in 1995 to a US-based radio station regarding a military officer who Reinaldo Alfaro had been told went missing and later died and a woman who was alleged to have been tortured. At Reinaldo Alfaro's trial, which took place at the *Tribunal Provincial de La Habana*, Havana People's Provincial Court, the above-mentioned woman and the mother of the military officer both appeared as witnesses and denied the reports. However, there were allegations that the woman who had claimed to Alfaro that she had been tortured was not the same woman who appeared in court denying that she had been tortured. In addition several witnesses were not allowed to testify. Alfaro had also been charged with "*propaganda enemiga*", "enemy propaganda" because of his planned actions with ALFIN mentioned above. However, at his trial this charge, which carries a maximum eight-year sentence, was dropped by the prosecutor.

Reinaldo Alfaro is said to suffer from serious back problems as a result of previous surgery on his spine. He is also said to suffer from various allergies, stomach problems and anaemia and has lost a lot of weight (for further information see AMR 25/18/98, 18 August 1998 and follow-up 25/22/98, 1 September 1998).

José Antonio Alvarado Almeida continues to be imprisoned in Villa Clara Provincial Prison, Villa Clara province. He was detained on 14 October 1997, along with a group of eleven other

members of the unofficial *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba (PPDHC)* who were protesting the arrest of Daula Carpio Mata. On 23 October 1997 ten of them were brought to trial in the Santa Clara municipal court (the other two detainees, including Daula Carpio's daughter, had been released). They were all charged with "*asociación para delinquir*", "associating with others to commit a crime", and "*desobediencia*", "disobedience". José Alvarado was sentenced to 18 months' "correctional work with internment". It is believed that all the detainees have now ceased their hunger strike.

Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, the director of *Linea Sur Press*, an independent press agency based in Cienfuegos, is currently serving a six year sentence for "*desacato*", "disrespect". He was detained by State Security on 14 August 1997 and held for three days. His trial subsequently took place on 28 November 1997. In April 1998 Bernardo Arévalo Padrón was beaten in the *Prisión Provincial de Cienfuegos*, Cienfuegos Provincial Prison, Ariza, reportedly because it was mistakenly believed that he had distributed anti-government propaganda within the prison. According to reports, as a result of the beatings he was left with a swollen face, his body was badly bruised, and he suffered from loss of memory throughout the year.

Félix A. Bonne Carcasés, a former university professor and member of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, remains imprisoned without trial at Guanajay Prison, Havana province. He was arrested on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**René Gómez Manzano**, **Vladimiro Roca Antúnez** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". They have still not been tried.

Daula Carpio Mata, the provincial delegate of the unofficial *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba (PPDHC)*, Party for Human Rights in Cuba, for Villa Clara Province remains imprisoned in Guamajal Women's Prison, Villa Clara province. She was arrested on 9 October 1997 and subsequently tried on 29 October 1997 when she was sentenced to 16 months' "correctional work with internment", charged with "*atentado*", "assault", on the grounds that she had verbally intimidated a prison doctor at the trial of fellow PPDHC member and prisoner of conscience Israel Feliciano García¹ in late July 1997. She is due to be released in February 1999.

¹ Israel Feliciano García had been sentenced in early 1997 to five months'

Julio César Coizeau Rizo (new case) is imprisoned in Boniato Prison, Santiago de Cuba province. He was detained on 30 October 1997 and subsequently tried and sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "disrespect", reportedly because he had written anti-government graffiti on public walls.

Jesús Joel Díaz Hernández (new case) was arrested on 18 January 1999 in Ciego de Avila province and, at a trial the following day, sentenced to four years' imprisonment for "*peligrosidad*", "dangerousness". Jesús Díaz's trial reportedly did not conform to international standards of fairness, particularly since his lawyer had inadequate time to prepare his defence. Jesús Díaz, who is executive director of the independent press agency *Cooperativa Avileña de Periodistas Independientes*, Cooperative of Independent Journalists of Ciego de Avila, is reportedly imprisoned in the *Prisión Provincial de Ciego de Avila*, Ciego de Avila Provincial Prison (nicknamed "Canaleta"). During the first 11 days of detention he carried out a hunger strike in protest at his arrest.

Jesús Díaz has been repeatedly threatened and harassed by the government, reportedly as a result of his independent work as a journalist. He has had a number of previous warnings that he must be employed by the State, and in 1996 was subjected to an "*acto de repudio*", act of repudiation - where a so-called "counter-revolutionary" is criticized and abused, sometimes physically, by groups of government supporters, and was also reportedly discharged from his job. In 1997 he was detained for several hours and threatened and in 1998 he was attacked in the street the day of a meeting of members of opposition groups and independent journalists.

René Gómez Manzano, a lawyer and founder of the independent lawyer's group *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, and a member of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, remains imprisoned without trial at Agüica Prison, Matanzas province. He was arrested on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **Vladimiro Roca Antúnez** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". They have still not been tried.

imprisonment after refusing to pay a fine imposed on him for attending a meeting of Concilio Cubano in 1996. A few days before he was due to be released, a new charge of "disrespect" was brought against him. At his trial in July 1997, he was sentenced to an additional three months' imprisonment. He has since been released.

Manuel Antonio González Castellanos, a reporter for the independent press agency *Cuba Press*, was detained on 1 October 1998 and is currently awaiting trial in the *Prisión Provincial de Holguín*, Holguín Provincial Prison, accused of "disrespect". Following his arrest in Holguín, his family wrote anti-government slogans on the walls and doors of their home. The following day their home was reportedly surrounded by several hundred people who were chanting threats and abuse. Government agents then forced open the door and beat two members of the family, **Yoani and Leonardo Varona González**, as well as a visitor at the house, **Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez**. The three of them were arrested, but Yoani Varona was released on 5 October and Roberto Rodríguez was also later released. According to reports Manuel González, Leonardo Varona, Yoani Varona and Roberto Rodríguez will all face trial, charged with "disrespect".

Iván Lema Romero, one of twelve PPDHC members arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, remains imprisoned at Villa Clara Provincial Prison, Villa Clara province. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

José Manuel Llera Benítez, one of twelve PPDHC members arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, remains imprisoned at Manacas Prison, Villa Clara province. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

Lilián Meneses Martínez, one of twelve PPDHC members arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, remains imprisoned at Guamajal Women's Prison, Villa Clara province, in spite of being sentenced to 18 months' *"trabajo correccional sin internamiento"*, "correctional work without internment". (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

Cecilio Monteagudo Sánchez, a member of the unofficial *Partido Solidaridad Democrático*, Democratic Solidarity Party, is currently serving a four year sentence in Guamajal Prison, Villa Clara province. He was detained on 15 September 1997 and on 13 February 1998 was convicted on a charge of *"propaganda enemiga"*, "enemy propaganda". The charges were made on the grounds that he wrote a leaflet which was never printed calling on people not to vote in the local elections that were due to be held in October 1997.

Ileana Peñalver Duque, one of twelve PPDHC members arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, remains imprisoned at Guamajal Women's Prison, Villa Clara province, in spite of being sentenced to 18 months' *"trabajo correccional sin internamiento"*, "correctional work without internment". (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, a specialist in international economic relations and member of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, remains imprisoned without trial at Ariza Prison, Cienfuegos province. He was arrested on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **René Gómez Manzano** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". They have still not been tried.

Orestes Rodríguez Urrutiner, acting president (*presidente interino*) of the unofficial *Movimiento Seguidores de Chivás*, Followers of Chivás Movement, in Santiago de Cuba, remains imprisoned at El Manguito Prison, Santiago de Cuba. He had been arrested in July 1997 and brought to trial on 11 November 1997 and sentenced to four years' imprisonment, charged with "enemy propaganda".

Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, an economist and member of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, remains imprisoned without trial at the *Centro de Reeducción de Mujeres de Occidente*, Womens' Reeducation Centre, La Habana province. She was arrested on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **René Gómez Manzano** and **Vladimiro Roca Antúnez**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". They have still not been tried.

Leonardo Varona González is the nephew of **Manuel Antonio González Castellanos** (see above). He was arrested, along with Yoani Varona and Roberto Rodríguez, on 2 October 1998 after protesting at the detention of his uncle. Although the latter two were released, Leonardo Varona and Manuel González remain imprisoned in Holguín Provincial Prison. The two men, as well as Yoani Varona and Roberto Rodríguez will all reportedly face trial, charged with "disrespect".

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED

Of those prisoners of conscience detained since January 1997, the following were released during 1998 and 1999:

Ana María Agramonte Crespo, president of the unofficial *Movimiento Acción Nacionalista*, National Action Movement, was conditionally released on 14 May 1998. She

had been arrested on 1 May 1997 and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment, charged with "disrespect" and "*resistencia*", "resistance". She was held at the *Centro de Reeducación de Mujeres de Occidente*, Women's Re-education Centre in Havana (the main prison for women nicknamed "Manto Negro").

Roxana Carpio Mata, sister of Daula Carpio Mata (see above), was released in February 1998 due to being pregnant. She had been detained on 14 October 1997, along with a group of eleven members of the unofficial *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* (PPDHC) who were protesting the arrest of Daula Carpio Mata. On 23 October 1997 ten of them were brought to trial in the Santa Clara municipal court (the other two detainees, including Daula Carpio's daughter, had been released). They were all charged with "*asociación para delinquir*", "associating with others to commit a crime", and "*desobediencia*", "disobedience". Roxana Carpio Mata was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment but was transferred to hospital shortly afterwards where it was discovered that she was pregnant. She was then permitted to serve the rest of her sentence at home.

Ricardo de Armas Hernández, provincial delegate of the unofficial *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba*, Party for Human Rights in Cuba, was reportedly released at the end of 1997 or early 1998. He had been arrested on 14 May 1997 and sentenced in July 1997 to nine months' imprisonment, charged with "disrespect".

Pascual Escalona Naranjo was released in February 1998 following Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba. He had been arrested on 22 July 1997 in Granma province and sentenced to one year's imprisonment, charged with "*peligrosidad*", "dangerousness".

Radamés García de la Vega, vice-president of the unofficial *Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia*, Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, was released on 24 February 1998 eight months before his sentence was due to expire. He had been arrested on 30 April 1997 in Santiago de Cuba province, and sentenced to eighteen months' "correctional work with internment", after being convicted of "*desacato a la figura del Comandante en Jefe*", "disrespect towards the Commander in Chief" (i.e. President Fidel Castro). It is not clear whether his release was on condition that he left the country. He has now left Cuba and has been granted asylum in the USA.

Vicente García Ramos, one of twelve PPDHC members who were arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, was released on 14 October 1998 on completion of his sentence. He had been sentenced to 18 months' "correctional work with internment". (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

Adel Sigfredo Martínez Armenteros, member of the national executive of the unofficial *Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre "Frank País"*, Frank País 30th November Democratic Party, was released on completion of his sentence. He had been arrested on 12 September

1997 and subsequently tried on a charge of "disrespect" and sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Dr Desi Mendoza Rivero, president of the *Colegio Médico Independiente de Santiago de Cuba*, Santiago de Cuba Independent Medical Association, was released on 20 November 1998 reportedly "for humanitarian reasons" due to ill health. However, his release was on condition that he leave the country. He has now left Cuba and has been granted asylum in Spain. He had been detained on 25 June 1997 in Santiago de Cuba, after making statements, which were disseminated by foreign media, about an epidemic of dengue fever in Santiago de Cuba which, according to him, had caused several deaths. He reportedly accused the authorities of covering up the true extent of the epidemic and of not taking sufficient measures to control it. He was brought to trial on 18 November 1997 and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, charged with "enemy propaganda".

Lorenzo Páez Nuñez, president of the unofficial *Centro No Gubernamental para los Derechos Humanos "José de la Luz y Caballero"*, José de la Luz y Caballero Non-Governmental Centre for Human Rights, as well as a correspondent for the independent press agency *Libertad*, Freedom, was released on 4 January 1999 on completion of his 18 month sentence. He had been detained on 10 July 1997 in Artemisa, Havana, and tried the following day, together with **Dagoberto Vega Jaime** (see below). Both were charged with "disrespect" and "*difamación*", "defamation", because of attempts to disseminate to contacts in the USA information about allegations of human rights violations.

Héctor Palacio Ruiz, president of the unofficial *Partido Solidaridad Democrático (PSD)*, Democratic Solidarity Party, and member of the national coordinating council of *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Concilium², was released in February 1998 following Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba. He had been arrested on 9 January 1997 following an interview with a German television station in which he criticised the Cuban Government and referred to declarations made by President Fidel Castro at the Sixth Ibero-American Summit in Chile in November 1996. On 4 September 1997 he was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for "disrespect" towards President Fidel Castro.

² *Concilio Cubano* is a forum of some 140 unofficial groups which was set up in October 1995. As a result of attempts to organize a national meeting in February 1996, scores of people were detained and several of the most prominent leaders imprisoned. See *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent*, AMR 25/14/96, April 1996, and *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile*, AMR 25/29/96, July 1996, for further details.

Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina, president of the unofficial *Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia*, Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, was released on 11 October 1998 on completion of his eighteen month sentence. He had been arrested on 8 April 1997 and brought to trial for "disrespect", and "*resistencia a la autoridad*", "resisting authority", after criticising the Fourteenth Youth and Student Festival. However, Nestor Rodríguez was re-detained in December 1998 after making a personal protest at the refusal of the Cuban Government to grant him permission to leave the country to attend a conference in Paris marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), to which he had been invited by Amnesty International and other NGOs. He was released a week later and ordered to go and live in Baracoa, Guantánamo province, where he had been born. He was also forbidden from going to Havana.

Efraín Rodríguez Santos, a member of the *Club Pueblos Cautivos de Cuba*, an unofficial group working for peasants who were evicted from their land during the 1960s, was released on 16 September 1998 four months before his sentence had expired. He had been arrested on 12 July 1997 after reportedly shouting out from his balcony "*¡Abajo Fidel!*", "Down with Fidel", and other statements which were critical of the government. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment, accused of "*desacato a la figura del Comandante Fidel Castro*", "disrespect to Commander Fidel Castro".

Danilo Santos Méndez, one of twelve PPDHC members who were arrested on 14 October 1997 in Santa Clara, was released on 6 October 1998. He had been sentenced to 18 months' "correctional work with internment". (See the case of José Antonio Alvarado Almeida above for background.)

Dagoberto Vega Jaime, an activist of the unofficial *Centro No Gubernamental para los Derechos Humanos "José de la Luz y Caballero"*, José de la Luz y Caballero Non-Governmental Centre for Human Rights, was released on 10 July 1998 on completion of his one-year prison sentence. He was detained on 10 July 1997 in Artemisa, Havana, and tried the following day, together with **Lorenzo Páez Núñez** (see above). Both were charged with "disrespect" and "defamation" because of their attempts to disseminate to contacts in the USA information about allegations of human rights violations.

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN AMR 25/01/98 WHO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAD FEARED MAY BE OR MAY HAVE BECOME PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International monitored the following cases in order to determine whether they were prisoners of conscience or may have become prisoners of conscience. They have all now been released, apart from **Cecilio Ruiz Rivero**.

Released

Juan Escandell Ramírez is no longer detained. He reportedly left Cuba in June 1998. He was a lawyer working for an independent lawyers' organization called the *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, and had defended several dissidents, including Héctor Palacio Ruiz (see above) and Félix Bonne Carcasés (see above). He had been detained and threatened with imprisonment on several occasions.

Alexander Hernández Lago completed a sentence of one year's correctional work without internment in September 1998. He had been detained on 23 September 1997 reportedly after police tried to arrest his mother for non-payment of a fine and he went into the street with a placard saying "*Ya estamos cansados de tanta arbitrariedad e injusticia, Derechos Humanos, Artículo 19, ¡Respétense!*", "We are fed up with so much arbitrariness and injustice, Human Rights, Article 19, Respect them!". Alexander Hernández Lago is reportedly a contributor to *Vitral*, an officially-sanctioned religious magazine published by the *Centro de Información Cívico-Religioso*, Centre for Civic and Religious Information.

Maritza Lugo Fernández, a member of the national executive of the unofficial *Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre*, 30 November Democratic Party, was arrested on 15 August 1997 and subsequently tried on 5 September 1997 and sentenced to two years' "*limitación de libertad*", "restricted freedom", charged with "*cohecho*", "bribery", on the grounds that she bribed a prison guard to smuggle money and a tape recorder into Unit 1580 Prison (also known as "El Pitirre") for another political prisoner. Her brother, ex-prisoner of conscience **Osmel Lugo Gutiérrez**, who is vice-president of the same group and was arrested in May 1996, was released in February 1998 following the Pope's visit to Cuba. He was serving a prison sentence of two years and six months for "disrespect".

Luis Mario Paredes Estrada, secretary of the unofficial *Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos (CUT)*, Unitary Council of Cuban Workers, and a member of the *Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre Frank País*, Frank País 30th November Democratic Party, in Manzanillo, Granma province, was released on 13 September 1998, on completion of his sentence. He had been arrested on 4 September 1997 and subsequently sentenced to one year's imprisonment for "dangerousness". Prior to his release he was reportedly threatened with a longer prison sentence if he did not give up his political activities.

Still Detained

Cecilio Ruiz Rivero, a member of the unofficial *Asociación de Lucha Frente a la Injusticia (ALFIN)*, Association for Struggle Against Injustice, was detained on 14 June 1997 and subsequently sentenced to six years' imprisonment for "disrespect", and "assault" in September 1997. He is carrying out his sentence in the *Prisión de Quivicán*, Quivicán Prison, Havana province. The exact reasons for the charges are not clear.

SOME RECENT CASES OF SHORT TERM DETENTION AND HARASSMENT

During 1998 and early 1999 several members of unofficial groups working in the field of civil and political rights, journalists working for independent press agencies, and human rights activists, were detained for short periods, most of whom were released without charge. Many were also subjected to other forms of intimidation, including being refused permission to leave the country with the right to return, and *actos de repudio*, acts of repudiation (organized by government officials using mass organizations that support the government) which involved being verbally abused and sometimes physically assaulted by government supporters. Particularly since September 1998, there have been several incidents of mass arrests:

On 7 and 8 September 1998 at least ten dissidents were arrested in the biggest crackdown on anti-government activism since the Pope's visit. The detainees, who were arrested at their homes in Havana, included **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González**, **Rolando Muñoz Yllobre** (President and Vice-President respectively of the *Fundación Lawton de Derechos Humanos*, Lawton Human Rights Foundation), **Miriam Cantillo** (*Central de Trabajadores Democráticos (CTDC)*, Centre for Democratic Workers), **María de los Angeles González Amaro** (journalist for the *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba (BPIC)*, Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba), **Roberto de Miranda** (Vice-President of the *Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes*, School of Independent Teachers), **Nancy de Varona Díaz** (President of the *Movimiento 13 de Julio*, July 13 Movement), **Miriam García Chávez** (President of the *Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes*), **Luis López Prendes** (Director of *BPIC*), **Leonel Morejón Almagro** (founder of *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Concilium), **Ofelia Nardo Cruz** (Vice-President of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos*, Confederation of Democratic Workers), **Vicky Ruiz Labrit** (President of the *Comité Cubano de Opositores Pacíficos*, Cuban Committee of Pacifist Opposition). Most of the detainees had taken part in a demonstration outside the court where Reinaldo Alfaro García was tried (see above). All were released without charge within one to six days. **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González** and **Rolando Muñoz** had also been detained for two weeks in July in connection with their peaceful anti-abortion activities.

On 27 November 1998 several people were detained after protesting outside the courtroom where the trial of **Mario Julio Viera González** was to take place. The trial was cancelled and Mario Viera, who is director of the independent press agency, *Cuba Verdad*, Cuba Truth, is currently awaiting trial at home. He is accused of "*injuria*", "slander", to the head of the legal department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because of an article he wrote implying the government was hypocritical in stating that the proposed international criminal court should be independent and impartial. AI believes that if sentenced, Mario Viera would be a prisoner of conscience. The demonstration outside the courtroom reportedly began peacefully but turned violent when members of the *Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida*, Rapid Response Brigades³, State Security agents and police, came to the scene and began to beat the

³ These were set up in 1991 "to defend the country, the Revolution and socialism

demonstrators with clubs. Several demonstrators shouted anti-government slogans and were detained, including **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Milagros Cruz Cano** (*Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre Frank País*, Democratic Party 30 of November Frank País), **Delio de la Cruz, Roberto de Miranda, Miriam García Chavez, Rolando Muñoz Yllobre**, and **Marisela Pompa** (*Partido Solidaridad Democrática*, Democratic Solidarity Party). All of the detainees were released without charge, most of them the following morning. However, on 4 December 1998 **Milagros Cruz Cano**, who is blind, was re-detained by State Security officials whilst waiting for a bus. She was initially held at the Maria Luisa police station in Havana where she was reportedly beaten by police officers which resulted in a swollen cheek and a bruise and scab below her eye. She was then transferred to Mazorra psychiatric hospital in Havana where she was held in an isolated cell called Córdoba, where the conditions of detention were said to be degrading as she was held in a cell with iron bars which other patients and guards could see into and where she had to carry out all personal hygiene. She was released on 14 December 1998 without charge.

On 10 December 1998 several people, including **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Miriam Cantillo, José Orlando González Bridon, Rolando Muñoz Yllobre, Ofelia Nardo Cruz, Omar Rodríguez Saludes** (a journalist for *Agencia Nueva Prensa (ANP)*, New Press Agency), **Ana María Ortega Jiménez** and **Gustavo Toirac González** (National Coordinator and Organizer respectively of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba*, Confederation of Democratic Workers of Cuba), were detained prior to a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to reports, the celebration began peacefully but trouble started when hundreds of members of the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, Union of Communist Youth, and other government sympathisers, came to the Butari Park where the celebration was to take place. All the detainees were subsequently released without charge.

On 16 December 1998 (the day of the trial of **Lázaro Constantín Durán**) and the previous evening, about a dozen people were detained, possibly to prevent them from attending the trial. All were released within a couple of days. They included **Ana María Agramonte Crespo** (*Movimiento Acción Nacionalista*, Nationalist Action Movement, see above page 6), **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Orlando Bordón Gálvez, Miriam Cantillo, Milagros Cruz Cano, Roberto de Miranda, Sara Franco** (*Movimiento Cristiano Amor y Paz*, Christian Peace and Love Movement), **Miriam García Chávez, Lázaro González, Marvin Hernández Monzón, Efrén Martínez Pulgarón** (journalist for *Cuba Press*), **Rolando Muñoz Yllobre, Ofelia Nardo Cruz, Benigno Torralbal Sánchez** (*Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba*), **Jesús Zúñiga** (journalist of the *Asociación de*

in all circumstances, by confronting and liquidating any sign of counter-revolution or crime" and were subsequently involved in numerous violent confrontations with dissidents. Their activities have appeared to be less frequent in recent years.

Periodistas Independientes de Cuba (APIC), Cuban Association of Independent Journalists). **Lázaro Constantín Durán** was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "*peligrosidad*", "dangerousness". He was reportedly beaten on arrest.

On 14 January 1999, about a dozen people were said to have been temporarily detained, allegedly to stop them from participating in a march to commemorate the anniversary of the birth of black rights activist, Martin Luther King. The detainees included **Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Miriam Cantillo, María de los Angeles González Amaro, Ofelia Nardo Cruz, Migdalia Rosado Hernández, Gustavo Toirac González**, and others.

Between 22 and 27 January 1999 at least a dozen people were detained, including several members of the *Fundación Lawton de Derechos Humanos*, such as **Ofelia Astorac, Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Rolando Muñoz Yllobre** and **Migdalia Rosado Hernández**. Other detainees included **Pedro Argüelles Morán** (journalist for *Cuba Press*), **Miriam Cantillo, Milagros Cruz Cano, María de los Angeles González Amaro, Santiago Martínez Trujillo** (*Unión de Periodistas y Escritores Cubanos Independientes (UPECI)*, Union of Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers), **Angel Pablo Polanco** (*Cooperativa de Periodistas Independientes (CPI)*, Independent Journalists' Cooperative), **Nancy Sotolongo** (UPECI) and **Joaquín Rafael Martínez Rodríguez** (*Unión Cívica Nacional*, National Civic Union). Members of the *Fundación Lawton* had reportedly just held a public meeting calling on people to join their peaceful struggle. A pilgrimage was also due to take place on 25 January 1999, to mark the anniversary of a mass that took place on Pope John Paul II's last day in Cuba in 1998, and on 28 January 1999 a peaceful human rights demonstration was due to take place in celebration of the birth of José Martí⁴. It is believed that the detainees have now been released.

The two most serious *actos de repudio* during 1998 both took place in October. The first of these was following the arrest of **Manuel Antonio González Castellanos** (see above page 4). The second *acto de repudio* took place on 26 October 1998 when at least 200 people, led by a member of State Security, gathered outside the home of **Segundo Cabrera González**, a member of the *Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos (CCPDH)*, Cuban Committee for Human Rights. The crowd reportedly threw stones and objects at his front door and threatened to take the Cabrera family to the main square so that the people could try them for their counter-revolutionary activities.

KEYWORDS: RELEASES / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION / NON-GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES / HARASSMENT
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⁴ José Martí: Cuban national hero - revolutionary, romantic poet, novelist and journalist, who fought for Cuban independence and died in battle in May 1895.