

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 25/009/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 199
6 November 2002

Embargo Date: 6 November 2002 00:01 GMT

Cuba: Freedom of expression still curtailed, despite recent release

Some critics of the Cuban government continue to face harassment and detention for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs, Amnesty International said today.

While welcoming the recent release of former political prisoner Oscar Elias Biscet -- whom the organization had adopted as a "prisoner of conscience" -- Amnesty International published today a new report detailing several cases of people detained in connection with their political activities.

Two of them -- Leonardo Bruzón Avila and Carlos Alberto Domínguez González -- are also considered by Amnesty International to be "prisoners of conscience," detained solely for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association. Both men were detained on 23 February 2002 and have been held without trial ever since.

"Freedom is the price that these two men are being made to pay for the exercise of their basic rights," Amnesty International said. "As such, they must be immediately and unconditionally released," the organisation continued.

Leonardo Bruzón was apparently arrested to prevent him from taking part in dissident activities. His health has recently deteriorated seriously following a hunger strike in protest against his detention, reportedly requiring transfer to hospital. The motives for the arrest of Carlos Alberto Domínguez were unclear, although in days preceding his arrest he had reportedly attended several Catholic masses on behalf of political prisoners.

Amnesty International's report includes several cases of people also apparently detained in relation to their involvement in peaceful dissident activities. These include Emilio Leyva Pérez and Lázaro Miguel Rodríguez Capote, detained since February without trial.

Additionally, the organization is reviewing the cases of numerous dissidents detained in the days following the 27 February incident in which a group of young Cubans drove a bus into the premises of the Mexican Embassy in Havana, in an apparent attempt to leave Cuba. The detained dissidents are said to be still awaiting formal charges.

**** The report, *CUBA: New prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience* will be available on the web at <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/amr250082002>**

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