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Cuba: Dozens of Cuban dissidents "will be brought to trial"

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Following a wave of targeted arrests of dissidents that began on 18 March 2003 in Cuba, Amnesty International is concerned that there may be 77 new prisoners of conscience on the island, detained for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association, the organization said in a report "[Cuba: Massive crackdown on dissent](#)" (AMR 25/008/2003) released today.

"In what appears to have been the biggest crackdown in a decade, independent journalists, members of human rights groups, political activists and other perceived dissidents across the country have been detained in a major police operation," Amnesty International said.

The detainees, who range from well-known dissidents to grassroots-level activists, remain imprisoned without charge, and the whereabouts of some of them is unknown.

According to reports, at the time of the arrests security forces searched homes across the island and confiscated computers, fax machines, typewriters, books and papers. Those detained could face up to 20 years in prison under harsh legislation introduced in 1999.

In addition to the detentions, other high profile opposition figures have been harassed. Plainclothes security agents were apparently posted outside the homes of among others Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, leader of a citizens' initiative on democratic changes and former prisoner of conscience Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, of the CCDHRN, a prominent human rights organization in Cuba.

"Amnesty International seeks immediate explanation from the Cuban authorities regarding the recent detentions including list of charges against them as well as the legal grounds on which they will be tried," the organization stressed.

In addition, the international human rights organization urges the Cuba government to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience in Cuba.

"We call on the authorities to reform the Cuban legislation which helps 'legitimise' the ongoing incarceration of prisoners of conscience by outlawing the exercise of fundamental freedoms," Amnesty International concluded.

Before the recent crackdown, Amnesty International had already recognised 15 prisoners of conscience in Cuba. With the latest mass arrests, the number of prisoners of conscience could rise to its highest level in recent years.

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