

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 25/11/99

EXTRA 31/99 Prisoners of conscience / Arbitrary arrests / Legal

concern

CUBA           Vladimiro ROCA ANTUNEZ  
                  Marta Beatriz ROQUE CABELLO  
                  René GOMEZ MANZANO  
                  Felix A. BONNE CARCASES

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Amnesty International is concerned that, following the introduction on 16 February 1999 of tough new legislation aimed at combatting political dissent, the above-named dissidents, who went to trial on 1 March 1999 may receive sentences of up to eight years in prison. The court is expected to sentence them in the next 12 days.

The four, members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, the Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, were arrested on 16 July 1997. The arrests followed their public criticism at an internationally-attended press conference a month earlier of the government paper: "*El Partido de la Unidad, la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos que Defendemos*", "The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights which we Defend" where they also handed out copies of their own critique of the document entitled "*La Patria es de Todos*", "The Homeland is for Everyone".

Around 100 dissidents, including journalists and human rights workers, were detained over the period of the trial in an apparent attempt to prevent them campaigning on behalf of the detainees, or from attending or reporting on the trial, which has generated worldwide media attention. The majority have now reportedly been released. It is not clear how many or who remain in detention.

During the trial the prosecution apparently accused the four dissidents of trying to discourage Cuban citizens from voting in elections. The prosecutor also alleged that their activities supported US policy on Cuba, particularly in relation to the US's economic sanctions against Cuba.

They are charged with '*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*', 'other acts against state security' (Article 125 (c) of the Cuban Penal Code) in relation to a charge of '*sedición*', 'sedition' (Art 100 (c) of the Cuban Penal Code).

Amnesty International believes the four to be prisoners of conscience, detained for their non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 16 February 1999 Cuba's National Assembly passed tough new legislation aimed at combating political dissent, called the "*Ley de Protección de la Independencia Nacional y la Economía de Cuba*", "Law for the Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba". Under this new law, dissidents and journalists found to be working against the Cuban state reportedly face up to 20 years in jail and huge fines. The law calls for seven to 15 years' imprisonment for passing information to the United States that could be used to bolster anti-Cuban measures such as the US economic blockade of the island, rising to 20 years if the information is acquired surreptitiously. The legislation also bans the ownership, distribution or reproduction of "subversive" materials from the US government, and proposes jail terms of up to 8 years for collaborating with radio and TV stations and publications deemed to be assisting US policy.

The media in Cuba is state-controlled and freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited. Many journalists working for independent agencies have been harassed, detained for short periods, threatened with detention if they continued their work, asked to leave the country or have become prisoners of conscience (see EXTRA 14/99, AMR 25/02/99).

For further information see Amnesty International reports: Imminent trial of four members of the "Grupo de Trabajo", AMR 25/24/98 and: One year later and four members of the "Grupo de Trabajo" still imprisoned without being informed of any charges, AMR 25/16/98. See also UA 221/97, AMR 25/20/97 and follow-ups.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- urging that Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, René Gómez Manzano and Felix A. Bonne Carcasés be immediately and unconditionally released, on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association;
- urging that all those detained in the past two days who are still in detention be released immediately if they are not to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- urging that freelance journalists and human rights activists be permitted to carry out their legitimate peaceful activities without interference from the authorities.

**APPEALS TO:**

Attorney-General

Dr Juan Escalona Reguera  
Fiscal General de la República  
Fiscalía General de la República  
San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba**

**Telexes: 511456 fisge**

**Fax: + 53 7 57 0795**

**E-mail: gr@teleda.get.cma.net**

**Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr Roberto Robaina González  
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Calzada No. 360  
Vedado, La Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba**

**Telexes: 511122 / 511464 / 512950**

**Faxes: + 53 7 333085 / 335261**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

Minister of the Interior

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra  
Ministro de Interior  
Ministerio del Interior  
Plaza de la Revolución  
La Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Havana, Cuba**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

Department of State Security

Sr Director, Departamento de Seguridad del Estado  
Villa Marista, La Víbora  
La Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Director, Villa Marista, Havana, Cuba**

**Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Cuban Journalists Union (official body)

Unión de Periodistas de Cuba, Calle 23 No. 452, Apartado 6646, Vedado, Havana, Cuba

Editor of Granma (daily newspaper)

Sr Jacinto Granda de Laserna, Granma, Apdo 6260, La Habana, Cuba

and to diplomatic representatives of Cuba accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**