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## **Public Statement**

### **Cuba**

#### **Amnesty International asks for the release of the four prisoners of conscience tried on 1 March**

Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, René Gómez Manzano and Felix A. Bonne Carcasés have been imprisoned for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association. Amnesty International is calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience.

The four prisoners -- all members of the Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation -- were all detained on 16 July 1997, but it was not until 23 September 1998 that they were charged with 'other acts against state security' in relation to a charge of 'sedition'. They were tried on 1 March 1999, but their sentence has not yet been announced. The court reportedly has up to 12 working days to make public its conclusions.

Amnesty International is also concerned that approximately 100 dissidents were arrested over the last two days, in what appears to have been an attempt to prevent them from carrying out their journalistic or human rights work or from attending the trial of the four dissidents. According to reports, most of the detainees have now been released, but it is not clear how many or who remain in detention.

The four prisoners of conscience awaiting sentencing were arrested following a press conference attended by foreign journalists in June 1997 during which they criticized an official discussion document: "The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights which we Defend". They also gave journalists a copy of their own critique of the document entitled "The Homeland is for Everyone".

On 16 February 1999 Cuba's National Assembly passed tough new legislation aimed at combatting political dissent, called the "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.

Amnesty International is concerned that this new legislation is a further obstruction to freedom of expression and may lead to more repressive measures being taken against journalists and critics of the government. It may be used in the case of these four prisoners to impose tougher sentences.

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