

EXTERNAL

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Prisoner of conscience

7 July 1997

**CUBA Héctor PERAZA LINARES, journalist for *Habana Press***

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Héctor Peraza Linares, a journalist working for the independent press agency *Habana Press*, was arrested on 23 June 1997 and remains in detention at State Security headquarters in Pinar del Río.

He is reportedly being held in a cell with no windows and not permitted any exercise. He has so far not had access to a lawyer, raising fears that he may be facing psychological pressures to implicate himself or sign a "confession", as commonly occurs to political detainees in Cuba during the initial days or weeks in custody. As far as Amnesty International is aware, he has not been charged and no reason has been given for his detention. The organization believes that he has been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Héctor Peraza was arrested with his wife by State Security agents in Pinar del Río. His home was reportedly searched and several items were confiscated, including a tape recorder, typewriter, computer, books and papers. His wife was released later the same day. On 27 June Héctor Peraza was reportedly taken by police to the home of his previous wife where a search was carried out and some money was confiscated. On 5 July, his mother was permitted to visit him and was told that he should appoint a lawyer. He had reportedly frequently violated a police order of "*destierro*" ("banishment"), which limited him to staying in Pinar del Río. This is a fairly new tactic of the Cuban Government to which several independent journalists have been subjected because of their journalistic activities.

Prior to this arrest Héctor Peraza has been harassed or detained on several occasions. In July 1995 he was detained and questioned and had his home searched. He was released shortly afterwards without charge. On 10 October 1995 he was summoned by police in the town of Quivicán, Havana province, and forced to sign an "official warning" by which he was given 10 days to stop working with *Habana Press* and find another job or be charged with "dangerousness". On 23 February 1996 Héctor Peraza was again arrested and released after a few days and sent back to his home province of Pinar del Río with a warning not to leave his home (see UA 175/95, AMR 25/08/95, 14 July 1995 and follow-ups AMR 25/09/95 and AMR 25/13/95).

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

All media in Cuba are state-controlled and freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited. In recent years a number of independent press agencies have emerged in an attempt to challenge the state monopoly on news but in the face of the restrictions are only able to disseminate their reports outside Cuba. Many journalists working for such agencies suffer frequent harassment, short-term detention and threats that they will be imprisoned if they do not cease their activities or leave the country. Others have been tried and sentenced and have become prisoners of conscience.

In May 1996 Rafael Solano, the director of *Habana Press*, which he founded in mid-1995, went to Spain, having been effectively expelled from Cuba by the Cuban Government. Prior to his forcible exile, Rafael Solano had been detained at least six times and warned that he would be imprisoned if he did not cease

his journalistic activities or leave the country (see UA 175/95, AMR 25/08/95, 14 July 1995). Joaquín Torres Alvarez, who took over the presidency of *Habana Press* when Rafael Solano was forced into exile, has also frequently been harassed and threatened with imprisonment. Most recently, on 31 May 1997, he was reportedly assaulted by individuals believed to be working for the Department of State Security (see UA 159/97, AMR 25/09/97, 2 June 1997).

For further information, 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.

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

- expressing concern at the reported arrest of Héctor Peraza Linares, a journalist working for *Habana Press*;
- urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released, on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- urging that as long as he is in detention, he be provided with full judicial guarantees, including immediate access to a lawyer of his choice.
- urging that members of *Habana Press* and other freelance journalists be permitted to carry out their legitimate peaceful activities without interference from the authorities.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) 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**

**Telex: 511456 fidge**

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

2) 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**

**Telex: 511122 / 511464 / 512950**

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

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

3) 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**

4) Department of State Security

Sr Director, Departamento de Seguridad del Estado

Pinar del Rio, Cuba

**Telegrams: Director, Seguridad del Estado, Pinar del Rio, Cuba**

**Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Cuban Journalists Union (official body)

Unión de Periodistas de Cuba

Calle 23 No. 452

Apartado 6656, Vedado, La Habana, 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.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 August 1997.