

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Cuba: Executions mark an unjustifiable erosion in human rights**

In yet another blow to respect for human rights, Cuban authorities have ended a three-year *de facto* moratorium on executions by sending three men to their deaths before an official firing squad, said Amnesty International today.

"Coming on the heels of the mass arrest and summary trials of at least 75 Cuban dissidents -- most of whom received shockingly lengthy prison terms ranging up to 28 years -- these executions mark a serious erosion in Cuba's human rights record."

"The executions are extremely worrying as a human rights development, not only because they signal the end of Cuba's widely-heralded *de facto* moratorium on executions," continued Amnesty International. "What is equally of concern is that the men were given a summary trial, and their appeals to the supreme court and the Council of State were dealt with in a cursory and wholly inadequate manner. They were shot and killed less than a week after their trial began."

The three men, Lorenzo Enrique Copello Castillo, Bárbaro Leodán Sevilla García and Jorge Luis Martínez Isaac, were among a group who reportedly hijacked a Cuban ferry with several dozen passengers on board on 2 April and tried to force it to the United States. The incident, the third hijacking in two weeks in Cuba, ended without bloodshed, after several days' standoff between Cuban security forces and the the hijackers.

Currently there at least 50 people on death row in Cuba. Amnesty International is concerned that these people may also face imminent execution given that the moratorium has ended, and has taken action by calling on authorities to urgently commute all pending death sentences.

Lorenzo Enrique Copello, Bárbaro Leodán Sevilla and Jorge Luis Martínez were convicted of terrorism under Law 93 of late 1991, which expanded existing anti-terrorism measures and reaffirmed the use of the death penalty in the most extreme cases. Another four hijackers received life sentences, while four others received shorter prison terms.

In an official statement on the executions on 11 April, the Cuban government claimed that it was undergoing serious provocations and threats to its national security emanating from the United States.

"There is no justification for executions, particularly following summary trials," Amnesty International responded. "Over the last four weeks, Cuba has reversed significant human rights progress made over a period of years. This represents a return to extreme repressive measures in use decades ago which cannot be justified, and which ultimately harm the Cuban people."

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