

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Cuba: dissidents must have a fair trial**

*Cuban dissident Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina and his co-defendant must be granted full judicial guarantees, including access to a lawyer of their choice, Amnesty International said today on the eve of the trial of two prominent members of the unofficial Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy.*

*Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina -- president of the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy -- will appear in court tomorrow to face charges of "disrespect", "public disorder" and "damage". Eddy Alfredo Mena y González, another member of the movement, is also scheduled to stand trial with him.*

*"Given the history of Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina's numerous past detentions and the nature of the charges brought against him, there are fears that these could be politically motivated," Amnesty International said.*

*Due to his opposition to the Cuban government, Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina has been arrested and imprisoned on a number of occasions.*

*"We have welcomed the recent releases of prominent 'prisoners of conscience' as positive steps," the organization said. "However we will continue to urge the Cuban authorities to amend the current legislation that criminally sanctions the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression."*

### **Background**

*Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina was arrested in 1996 following peaceful attempts to organize a movement for university reform. After a summary trial in which he did not have access to defence counsel, he was sentenced to 12 months' restricted liberty, as well as to five years' "banishment" to his home town, on charges of "resisting authority" and "disrespect". In 1997, he was again arrested and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment, again on charges of "resisting authority" and "disrespect", after criticizing the Fourteenth Youth and Student Festival scheduled for later that year in Cuba. In December 1998 he was*

*detained for one week following the government's refusal to allow him to attend a conference in Paris marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In July 1999 he was again briefly detained in the context of a hunger strike to demand respect for human rights in Cuba. He was last arrested on 2 March 2000.*

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>