

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Prisoner of Conscience/Legal Concern/  
Health Concern

25 July 1991

CUBA: Roberto LUQUE ESCALONA, writer and former journalist, aged 55

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Amnesty International is concerned about the arrest on 19 July 1991 in Havana of Roberto Luque Escalona. It believes him to be a prisoner of conscience.

On 19 July 1991 a crowd of about 20 people reportedly went to his house and proceeded to shout insults against him and write pro-government slogans on the walls in what has come to be known as an "act of repudiation" ("**acto de repudio**"). Roberto Luque Escalona, a known dissident, had initiated a hunger strike three days earlier. While the crowd was outside the house, two plainclothes policemen arrived and took Roberto Luque away. It was later established that he had been taken to the headquarters of the **Departamento Técnico de Investigaciones (DTI)**, Technical Investigations Department. He is believed to be held on a public order charge carrying a sentence of either a fine or between three months and one year's imprisonment, on the grounds that he caused offence to the crowd by responding to their provocation by shouting anti-government slogans and displaying a banner (**cartel**).

Roberto Luque Escalona had originally supported the Cuban Revolution. However, in 1970, he reportedly lost his job at the Cuban press agency **Prensa Latina** after disagreeing with the way in which the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had been covered and because he had submitted a political novel to a literary competition. In 1972, he obtained a post as an editor (**corrector de estilo**) at Havana University but lost it in 1990 when the authorities found out that a book that he had written called **Fidel: The Judgement of History, Fidel: El Juicio de la Historia**, had been smuggled out of the country and was going to be published in Mexico. The book is severely critical of President Fidel Castro and the Cuban government. In July 1990 he initiated a hunger strike lasting 35 days, calling for "a national opening which could lead to a peaceful solution to the increasingly serious social and economic crisis in Cuba, created by the recent transformations in the socialist countries" ("**una apertura nacional que pueda ofrecer una solución pacífica al agravamiento de la crisis social y económica de Cuba, impulsado por las recientes transformaciones en los países socialistas**"). Roberto Luque Escalona is also a leading member of a recently-established unofficial group called **Criterio Alternativo**, Alternative View, and was one of nine signatories of a so-called "Statement by Cuban Intellectuals" ("**Declaración de los Intelectuales Cubanos**") issued in June 1991 listing five measures they believe to be required "to promote and ensure broad national debate" ("**para prober y asegurar un amplio debate nacional**"). The statement provoked an angry response from the authorities and government supporters, and the state-owned daily newspaper, **Granma**, accused them of treason. Following that incident, Roberto Luque reportedly said that if he was arrested, he would go on total hunger strike, including food and liquid. The hunger strike he initiated on 16 July 1991 (prior to his arrest) was undertaken to coincide with the Panamerican Games due to start in Havana at the end of July and was planned to last a month.

Amnesty International believes that Roberto Luque Escalona is a prisoner of conscience detained for peacefully expressing his political beliefs. The organization is also concerned that he may not have access to lawyers.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There are no opposition parties in Cuba - the only party permitted under the Cuban Constitution is the Cuban Communist Party. Over the past three or four years, several unofficial groupings of varying tendencies, some overtly advocating political change and others concerned specifically with respect for human rights, have emerged. None have received official

recognition from the Cuban authorities, although their activities were for a brief period generally tolerated. However, since mid-1989 dozens of non-violent political and human rights activists have faced harassment and detention, many for only short periods. Some, however, have been sentenced to up to seven years' imprisonment as in the case of prisoner of conscience Esteban González González, the founder of the Movimiento Integracionista Democrático (MID), Movement for Democratic Integration, sentenced to seven years for "rebellion" (**rebelión**). In recent weeks, the authorities have set up "Rapid Response Brigades" (**Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida**), for which ordinary citizens have been asked to volunteer. These groups, together with the security forces and Communist Party organizations, appear to be under explicit instructions to crack down on any signs of unrest or dissidence. Several reports have already been received of known dissidents, including human rights activists, being verbally and physically attacked in the street and in some cases being detained for several hours before being released with warnings to cease their "counter-revolutionary" activities.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes and airmail letters:**

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Roberto Luque Escalona on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience detained for peacefully expressing his political beliefs;
- requesting that he be humanely treated while in detention, allowed full access to family and lawyers, and be granted adequate medical supervision;
- requesting that all independent human rights monitors and non-violent political dissidents be permitted to carry out their legitimate activities unhindered.

**APPEALS TO:**

Dr Fidel Castro Ruz  
**[Salutation: Su Excelencia]**  
 Presidente del Consejo de Estado  
 y del Consejo de Ministros  
 Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba

**Telegrams: Presidente Castro, Havana, Cuba**

**Telexes: 51212 P DESP PRESID**

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra

**[Salutation: Señor Ministro]**

Ministro del Interior  
 Ministerio del Interior  
 Plaza de la Revolución  
 Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba

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

**Telexes: 511122 / 511464 / 511560 MINREX HAB**

Dr Ramón de la Cruz Ochoa

**[Salutation: Señor Fiscal General]**

Fiscal General de la República  
Fiscalía General de la República  
San Rafael 3  
Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba

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

**Telexes: 511456 FISGE**

**COPIES TO:**

CODEHU (Coordinating body of human  
1040 S.W. 27 Ave rights organizations in Cuba,  
Miami which includes the CCDHRN)  
FL 33135, USA

and to diplomatic representatives of Cuba in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 September 1991.