EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 25/22/91 Distr: UA/SC

PLEASE ORGANIZE UP TO FIFTEEN APPEALS PER SECTION

PRIORITY

UA 288/91	Prisoner of Conscience/Legal Concern	23 August 1991

CUBA:	María Celina RODRIGUEZ (female)	
Amnesty International	is concerned about the arrest on 2 August 1991 in	n Havana
of María Celina Rodríg	uez. It believes her to be a prisoner of cons	cience.

María Celina Rodríguez is the president of an unofficial group called Libertad y Fe, Freedom and Faith, which advocates greater freedom of religion. She is reported to have announced publicly that she intended to make statements to the press about "the real situation of the country" during the Pan-american Games which began on 30 July in Cuba. Her arrest is believed to have taken place on 2 August as she was about to address a group of foreign journalists. She was taken first to the Havana headquarters of the Departamento de Seguridad del Estado (DSE), Department of State Security which is known as Villa Marista, where she was reportedly held in incommunicado detention for 11 days before being transferred to Havana Psychiatric Hospital. According to Cuban law, detainees can be referred to psychiatric institutions for tests in order to establish whether they are fit to stand trial. This procedure has in the past been open to abuse, particularly in the case of political prisoners. María Celina Rodríguez's three-year-old son who was with her when she was detained, is believed to have been handed over to relatives by DSE officials.

On 22 July 1991, DSE officials reportedly searched her home. They threatened to take her son away and to evict her from the building which is said to be in a dangerous state and in which she is apparently living illegally. Another local state official is said to have recently made threats against her life.

Amnesty International believes that María Celina Rodríguez is a prisoner of conscience detained for peacefully trying to express her views. The organization is also concerned that she may not have access to lawyers. Detainees being held by the DSE or in psychiatric institutions often do not have access to a lawyer until after they have been transferred to prison, sometimes several weeks or months after arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent weeks, apparently in preparation for the Pan-american Games during which an unusually large number of foreigners were expected in the country, 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 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. At least one

person, Roberto Luque Escalona, remains in detention under investigation, accused of insulting President Fidel Castro (see UA 257/91, AMR 25/19/91, 25 July 1991 and follow-up AMR 25/20/91, 26 July 1991).

There are no opposition parties in Cuba - the only party permitted under the Cuban Constitution is the Cuban Communist Party - and freedom of speech is severely limited. While several religions exist in Cuba, their public activities are often subject to restrictions. 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 Democrática (MID), Movement for Democratic Integration, sentenced to seven years for "rebellion" (rebelión) in June 1990.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of María Celina Rodríguez on the grounds that she is a prisoner of conscience detained for peacefully trying to express her views;

- requesting that she be humanely treated while in detention and allowed full access to family and lawyers;

- requesting that all independent human rights monitors and non-violent political dissidents be permitted to carry out their legitimate activities unhindered.

APPEALS TO

(1)
Dr Fidel Castro Ruz Señor Presidente
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

(2) General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra Señor Ministro Ministro del Interior Ministerio del Interior Plaza de la Revolución Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Havana, Cuba Telexes: 511122

(3)
Dr Ramón de la Cruz Ochoa Estimado Dr de la Cruz Ochoa
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 (4) Señor Jefe del Cuartel General del Señor Jefe Departamento de Seguridad del Estado (DSE) Villa Marista Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba Telegrams: Jefe Seguridad del Estado, Villa Marista, Havana, Cuba

(5)
Dr Carlos Amat Forés Señor Ministro
Ministro de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia
Calle O No. 216, 8vo piso
entre 23 y Humboldt
Vedado, Ciudad de la Habana
Cuba
Telegrams: Ministro Justicia, Havana, Cuba
Telexes: 511 331 MINJU CU

COPIES TO:

Information Bureau of Human Rights Movement in Cuba 3901 S.W. 109 Ave, Apt B10 Miami FL 33165, 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 4 October 1991.