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CUBA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS AT POLICY OF FORCIBLE EXILE OF DISSIDENTS

Amnesty International is concerned at the increasing tendency of the Cuban authorities to exert pressure on government opponents and human rights defenders who are either already serving prison sentences or facing possible imprisonment to go into exile.

“Allowing prisoners of conscience or potential prisoners of conscience to go into exile is just another way to stifle internal dissent and not a humanitarian act”, the organization said today.

The case of journalist Rafael Solano, who arrived in Spain yesterday, is the most recent example. Rafael Solano has been arrested at least six occasions in the last year on account of his work with independent press agency *Habana Press*. Following his arrest on 27 February, he was charged with “associating with others to commit a crime” [”asociación para delinquir”] but released on 8 April to await trial. While in detention and since his release, he has been subjected to strong pressure from the Department of State Security [Departamento de Seguridad del Estado] to leave Cuba or face up to three years’ imprisonment. Amnesty International believes that if convicted and imprisoned, he would have been a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

In August 1994, when over 30,000 people fled Cuba by sea, Amnesty International received reports that some of them had been forcibly taken by the Cuban authorities and put on rafts or boats. Since then, the organization has received frequent reports that government opponents and human rights activists have been threatened with imprisonment if they do not give up their activities or leave the country.

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