

Cuba: New convictions overshadow releases

Despite the release of nine prisoners of conscience in Cuba since the beginning of the year, politically motivated arrests continue and have led to new cases of prisoners of conscience, said Amnesty International today in its new report entitled: "Cuba: Prisoners of conscience: New convictions overshadow releases."

*In July, Nestor Rodríguez Lobaina, president of the unofficial Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, *Movimiento de Jóvenes Cubanos por la Democracia*, was sentenced to six years and two months for *Adisrespect@*, "public disorder@" and *Adamages@*. Eddy Alfredo Mena y González, another member of the movement, stood trial on the same charges and was sentenced to five years and one month.*

Amnesty International believes that the two have been imprisoned due to the non-violent exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association, and calls for their unconditional release as prisoners of conscience.

In its report, Amnesty International outlines the facts behind these new cases of prisoners of conscience. The report also provides details on the cases of the nine prisoners of conscience who have been released conditionally or upon completion of their prison terms since the beginning of 2000.

"We welcome the recent releases of prominent prisoners of conscience as positive steps towards greater respect for human rights in Cuba," the organization said. "However, the individuals concerned should never have been imprisoned in the first place, and we will continue to call on

the Cuban government to immediately and unconditionally release the prisoners of conscience who remain in Cuban jails.’

"Dissidents -- including journalists, political activists and human rights defenders -- continue to suffer severe harassment," the organization continued. Several hundred people, at least 21 of whom are currently identified by Amnesty International as being prisoners of conscience, remain imprisoned for political offences.

Amnesty International rejects the Cuban government's justifications that it restricts freedoms of expression, association and assembly in order to maintain the unity of Cuba in the face of hostility from abroad. The organization has repeatedly sought the immediate and unconditional release of all those imprisoned in Cuba for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and calls on the Cuban government to reform its legislation to bring it in line with international protection of these freedoms.

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For more information or to request a copy of the report "*Cuba: Prisoners of conscience:*

New convictions overshadow releases," (AI Index: AMR 25/21/00) 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>