

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 25/26/97

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 10 per Section

UA 273/97

Prisoners of conscience / Legal concern

14 August 1997

CUBARaúl RIVERO CASTAÑEDA, journalist and founder of *Cuba Press*, aged 52
William CORTÉS, correspondent for *Cuba Press*
Efrén MARTÍNEZ PURGARÓN, correspondent for *Cuba Press*

Three members of *Cuba Press*, an independent press agency, are reported to have been detained in recent days. None of the journalists is believed to have had access to a lawyer since arrest, and Amnesty International is concerned that they may be put under psychological pressure to sign incriminating statements or to agree to go into exile. The organization believes that all three are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Raúl Rivero Castañeda, the founder of *Cuba Press*, was detained by State Security officials at his home in Havana on 12 August. Officials are also reported to have searched his home for several hours, removing several files relating to *Cuba Press*, as well as books and documents. He was taken to *Villa Marista*, the headquarters of the Department of State Security. When his wife went there on 13 August, she was informed by an official that her husband was being held for "*posesión de documentos ilegales que constituyen un delito*", "possession of illegal documents which constitute a criminal offence". She was also told that she should return on the 19 August with a lawyer to find out the exact charges against her husband.

Raúl Rivero has been detained on several occasions in the past. The last time, on 28 July 1997, he was reportedly told that the authorities intended to destroy *Cuba Press* and that if he did not cease his activities, he would face long-term imprisonment. It is believed that the latest action against him may be due to his reporting of the arrest on 16 July of four members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, the Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation. The four remain in detention and are believed to be under investigation on a charge of "*propaganda enemiga*", "enemy propaganda", and possibly other serious charges.

Two other correspondents for *Cuba Press* are currently in detention in Pinar del Río. William Cortés was detained on 28 July, together with several other journalists in that region. The others were released shortly afterwards but William Cortés has remained in detention at the State Security headquarters.

No official explanation has been given for his arrest. Efrén Martínez Purgarón was detained on 13 August in San Luis, Pinar del Río. It is not yet clear where he is being held.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since April at least 18 other independent journalists have been detained for short periods and threatened because of their activities. They include Luís Lopez Prendez, who was detained on 16 July and held for two days before being released. Another independent journalist, Lorenzo Paez Nuñez, was arrested in Artemisa, Havana, on 10 July 1997, tried the following day in a municipal court and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment for "*difamación*", "defamation", and "*desacato*", "disrespect". Two other independent journalists, Lázaro Lazo and Olance Noguerras, left the country on 28 July after having been subjected

to serious threats and harassment because of their journalistic activities for the past two years. Upon arriving in the USA, Olanse Noguerras reportedly said that he had been asked by State Security officials to persuade Raúl Rivero to leave Cuba, and that if Rivero chose not to leave, he would face many years in prison.

All media in Cuba are state-controlled and freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited. In recent years a number of independent press agencies have emerged in an attempt to challenge the state monopoly on news but in the face of the restrictions are only able to disseminate their reports outside Cuba. Journalists working for such agencies suffer frequent harassment, short-term detention and threats that they will be imprisoned if they do not cease their activities or leave the country. Others have been tried and sentenced and have become prisoners of conscience.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern at the reported arrest of Raúl Rivero Castañeda, William Cortés and Efrén Martínez Purgarón, all journalists working for *Cuba Press*;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released, on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- urging that as long as they are in detention, they be provided with full judicial guarantees, including immediate and continuing access to a lawyer of their choice;
- urging that members of *Cuba Press* and other freelance journalists be permitted to carry out their legitimate peaceful activities without interference from the authorities.

APPEALS TO:

1) Attorney-General

Dr Juan Escalona Reguera
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General de la República
San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba

Telex: 511456 fisge

Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

2) Minister of the Interior

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra
Ministro de Interior, Ministerio del Interior
Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Cuba

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Havana, Cuba

Fax: + 53 7 335261 / + 53 7 333085 (via Foreign Affairs, ask for fax to be forwarded)

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

3) [For Raúl Rivero only] Department of State Security, Havana

Sr Director, Departamento de Seguridad del Estado
Villa Marista, Cuba

Telegrams: Director, Seguridad del Estado, Villa Marista, Cuba

Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Sir

4) [For William Cortés and Efrén Martínez Purgarón only]

Department of State Security, Pinar del Río
Sr Director, Departamento de Seguridad del Estado
Pinar del Río, Cuba

Telegrams: Director, Seguridad del Estado, Pinar del Rio, Cuba
Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Cuban Journalists Union (official body)
Unión de Periodistas de Cuba
Calle 23 No. 452, Apartado 6656, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba

Editor of Granma (daily newspaper)
Sr Jacinto Granda de Laserna
Granma, Apdo 6260, La Habana, Cuba

and to diplomatic representatives of Cuba accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 September 1997.