

AI Index: PRE 01/132/2011
11 March 2011

Cuba must release prisoner of conscience on hunger strike

Amnesty International has called on the Cuban authorities to release an activist on hunger strike who was detained for his human rights work three months ago and is set to face trial at the end of March.

Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina, the president and co-founder of the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, was arrested last December in relation to a meeting he organized at his home in August 2010 and anti-government banners he displayed outside his home.

Néstor, his brother Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina and three other members of the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy - Enyor Díaz Allen, Roberto González Pelegrín and Francisco Manzanet - have been charged with public order offences relating to an attack on his home by a mob opposed to the meeting.

The five men were arrested in August 2010 but released the following month. Only Nestor Rodriguez Lobaina was rearrested.

Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina has spent more than three months in prison for expressing his opinions, defending democracy and promoting human rights in Cuba. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience jailed solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and is calling on the Cuban authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, or bear the responsibility of the impact of the hunger strike on Néstor's physical integrity", said Gerardo Ducos of Amnesty International.

"Néstor imprisonment is yet another example of the suppression of the rights to freedom of expression and association in Cuba."

Held at Combinado de Guantánamo prison, Nestor started his hunger strike on 15 February. The next day he was transferred to an isolation cell and denied water for eight days.

Nestor's health deteriorated during his hunger strike and on 28 February he was transferred to a health post in the prison. He was then transferred to Augustino Neto Provincial Hospital on 1 March.

Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina was arrested by state security agents in Guantanamo on 9 December 2010. He was pepper sprayed and manhandled into a police car in front of his 10-year-old daughter who was left alone in the street as her father was taken into custody.

While in detention Néstor says he has suffered beatings and threats from other inmates.