

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 03/00 Prisoner of conscience

18 January 2000

CUBA Víctor Rolando ARROYO CARMONA, journalist

Journalist Víctor Arroyo has been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for collecting toys to give away to children. The authorities are now considering his appeal. Amnesty International believes the charges against him are politically motivated, and considers him a prisoner of conscience.

On 8 January State Security officers reportedly searched Víctor Arroyo's home, in Pinar del Río province, and confiscated some 140 toys. He had apparently bought the toys to give away to the poor children of the province, with money raised by Cuban exile groups in Miami in a Christmas appeal called *Proyecto Reyes Magos del Milenio*, the Millennium Three Wise Men Project. Víctor Arroyo had reportedly already handed out over 100 toys to children in the area.

On 14 January 2000 he was convicted of "acaparamiento", "hoarding" the toys (Article 230 of the Cuban Penal Code).

Amnesty International believes that his conviction was motivated by his work for the independent press agency *Unión de Periodistas y Escritores Cubanos Independientes* (UPECI), Union of Cuban Independent Journalists and Writers, and his links with Miami exile groups opposed to the government.

Víctor Arroyo had previously been jailed for one year and nine months in 1996, for "desacato", "disrespect" and "atentado", "assault", reportedly after an incident involving a policeman. He was briefly detained in November 1999.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrest of Víctor Arroyo comes during a clampdown on dissidents. During November and December 1999, around the time of the Ibero-American Summit in Havana, some 260 people, including independent journalists, human rights defenders and political opponents, were detained. Eleven are now awaiting trial. Amnesty International believes that there are several hundred political prisoners in Cuba.

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

- urging that Víctor Rolando Arroyo Carmona be immediately and unconditionally released on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

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

Telexes: 511456 fisge

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Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Felipe Pérez Roque

Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Calzada No. 360, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba
Telexes: 511122 / 511464 / 512950
Faxes: + 53 7 33 3085 / 33 3460
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

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
Faxes: + 53 7 335261
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

National Union of Jurists
Unión Nacional de Juristas
Apartado 4161
La Habana 4, 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 15 February 2000.