

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 25/004/2001

Distrib: PG/SC

To: Health professionals

From: Medical office / America Program

Date: 15 May 2001

Further information on

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Political prisoners in need of medical attention
Cuba**

[also see AMR 25/40/99, 12 October 1999]

Key words POC / political prisoners / ill-health / inadequate medical care

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned for the health of three political prisoners, Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente (64), Arturo Suárez Ramos (37) and Charles Valdés Suárez (36), and one prisoner of conscience, José Orlando González Bridón (48). All are imprisoned in Combinado del Este Prison in La Habana province and have reportedly not received medical attention despite their repeated requests for medical care due to their ill-health.

Recommended actions

Please write letters in Spanish, English or your own language:

expressing concern about reports of ill-health of José Orlando González Bridón, Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente, Arturo Suárez Ramos and Charles Valdés Suárez, held in Combinado del Este Prison, La Habana province;

asking for details on the current state of health of each of the above men;

calling on the authorities to provide the men with access to adequate nutrition and medical care;

stating that you recognize that economic factors, including the US trade embargo, may affect standards of nutrition and medical care in prisons, but that conditions of detention should conform to internationally recognized minimum standards, such as those outlined in the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* and the *UN Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*;

requesting information regarding the conditions in Combinado del Este Prison;

asking for information on the regulations regarding the right of relatives of prisoners to bring medicines into the prison.

Additional recommendation concerning the case of José Orlando González Bridón:

urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him on the grounds that he is imprisoned solely for the non-violent expression of his right to freedom of expression and association.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 13 July, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Addresses

Head of State and Government
Dr Fidel Castro Ruz
Presidente de los Consejos de
Estados y de Ministros
La Habana, Cuba
Fax: via Ministry of Foreign Affairs: +53.7.333 085 / 335 261
Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Attorney-General
Dr Juan Escalona Reguera
Fiscal General de la Rep**u**blica,
Fiscal**R**a General de la Rep**u**blica
San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: Fiscal General,
Havana, Cuba
Fax: +53.7.570795/ 53 7 669 485
Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sr Felipe P**J**rez Roque
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores,
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Calzada No. 360
Vedado, La Habana, Cuba
Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores,
Havana, Cuba
Fax: +53.7.333 085 / 335 261/ 333 460
Salutation: Se**Z**or Ministro / Dear Minister

Interior Secretary
General Abelardo Colom**J** Ibarra
Ministerio del Interior y
Prisiones
Ministerio del Interior
Plaza de la Revoluci**\n**
La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +53 7 33 5261 / 301566
Salutation: Se**Z**or Director

Please also send copies of your letter to diplomatic representatives of Cuba accredited to your country.

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MEDICAL CONCERN

**Political prisoners in need of medical attention
Cuba**

Amnesty International is concerned for the health of three political prisoners, Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente (64), Arturo Suárez Ramos (37) and Charles Valdés Suárez (36), and one prisoner of conscience, José Orlando González Bridón (48). All are imprisoned in Combinado del Este Prison in La Habana province and have reportedly not received medical attention despite their repeated requests for medical care due to their ill-health.

Background information

José Orlando González Bridón (prisoner of conscience)

José Orlando González Bridón (aged 48) is reportedly suffering from weight loss, frequent headaches, nose bleeds, raised blood pressure and insomnia.

José Orlando González Bridón has been detained since 15 December 2000 charged with "enemy propaganda". The prosecutor has requested seven years' imprisonment. He is currently awaiting trial.

He is Secretary General of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba*, Cuban Democratic Workers' Union. He was detained prior to a religious procession which was due to take place two days later in Havana. Many activists were also temporarily detained that day. He has reportedly been accused of belonging to a "counter-revolutionary" group, mixing with those who are against the revolutionary process, and sending anti-government information to radio stations in Miami, USA. In February 2001 José Gonzalez carried out a hunger strike demanding the release of political prisoners. He is considered by Amnesty International to be a prisoner of conscience

Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente

Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente (aged 64) is reportedly suffering from lower back pain, cervical arthrosis, persistent stomach ache, weight loss and raised blood pressure. He has reportedly not received medical attention for one year.

Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente has been detained since 13 August 1992. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on charges of "espionage" and "illegal exit" from the country.

Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente is an ex-lieutenant colonel who retired from the armed forces in 1986 and began to work as an engineer. In 1989 after writing an open letter to the government of Fidel Castro disagreeing with its policies and resigning from the Communist Party, he reportedly began to be harassed. He began to make denunciations about human rights violations and founded a clandestine organization in 1990 called *Libertad y Democracia*, "Liberty and Freedom". Amnesty International is particularly concerned that Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente may not have had a fair trial. He has reportedly been on several hunger strikes since his imprisonment. He was consequently held in punishment cells on various occasions. He is reportedly victimised by common prisoners and on one occasion was beaten by them, and consequently confines himself to his cell 24 hours a day. [Please see medical action AMR 25/40/99, 12 October 1999: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR250401999?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\CUBA>].

Arturo Suárez Ramos

Arturo Suárez Ramos (aged 37) is reportedly suffering from migraines, gradual loss of vision, back pain, persistent stomach ache, diarrhoea and weight loss. He also has difficulty walking due to pain in the knee following an operation. He has been on several hunger strikes in the past demanding his release.

Arturo Suárez Ramos has been detained since 10 May 1987. He was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment on charges of "piracy" and "illegal exit" out of the country. He was imprisoned for his participation in an attempt to hi-jack a Cuban Airlines aeroplane in 1987 in order to escape the country. Several passengers were reportedly injured by hand grenades. He was originally condemned to death but his sentence was commuted on appeal.

Charles Valdés Suárez

Charles Valdés Suárez (aged 36) is reportedly suffering from bronchial asthma. According to reports he went on hunger strike in September 2000, because he was not receiving medical attention.

Charles Valdés Suárez has been imprisoned since 6 August 1994. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for "piracy" due to his involvement in the attempted high-jacking of a boat in which he and several others intended to travel to the USA.

Prisoners' rights to health care

The *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* were first adopted by the UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1955 and amended in 1977. They include the following articles on health care services:

Art (22)

(1) At every institution there shall be available the services of at least one qualified medical officer who should have some knowledge of psychiatry. The medical services should be organized in close relationship to the general health administration of the community or nation. (...)

(2) Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civic hospitals. (...)

Art (25)

(1) The medical officer shall have the care of the physical and mental health of the prisoners and should daily see all sick prisoners, all who complain of illness, and any prisoner to whom his attention is specially directed.(...)

Art (26)

(1) The medical officer shall regularly inspect and advise the director upon:

- (a) The quantity, quality, preparation and service of food;
- (b) The hygiene and cleanliness of the institution and the prisoners;
- (c) The sanitation, heating, lighting and ventilation of the institution;
- (d) The suitability and cleanliness of the prisoners' clothing and bedding; (...)