

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 25/10/96

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

UA 52/96

Legal Concern / Health Concern

28 February 1996

CUBADr Omar GONZÁLEZ MARTIN, paediatric surgeon, aged about 50

On 24 February 1996 Dr Omar González Martín was detained by the Cuban authorities as he was boarding a flight for Mexico. Amnesty International is concerned that he may have been detained for his decision to leave Cuba several years ago, and fears that he may be subjected to pressures to sign incriminating statements. There is also concern that his detention may exacerbate heart problems he is said to have.

Dr González, former deputy director of the William Soler Children's Hospital in Havana, went to Mexico some three years ago for work purposes and decided not to return to Cuba. His family are still in Cuba and he asked permission to return to visit them. While in Mexico, he reportedly had good relations with the Cuban Embassy who helped him arrange the trip back to Cuba. He arrived in Cuba on 10 February and while there he reportedly had no problems with the authorities.

However, on 24 February he was detained as he was about to board his return flight to Mexico. His family only became aware that he had not left Cuba when friends in Mexico told them he was not on the flight. His wife later received a phone call from someone who did not identify himself and who passed her on to her husband who said, while appearing to read from a statement, that he was all right but that he had a problem with immigration. She then went to make enquiries at the Department of State Security in Havana. They denied having him in their custody.

On 27 February Dr González phoned his wife and told her that she could go to visit him at a house in Miramar, a suburb of Havana, which reportedly belongs to the Department of Immigration and was guarded by soldiers. She was able to speak to him for half an hour in the presence of officials. She was not told anything by the authorities about the reasons for his detention.

It is feared that the Cuban authorities may be considering whether to charge him with desertion or another offence related to the fact that he had not returned to Cuba. He had worked for several years as an army doctor but was not formally a member of the army. He had reportedly left that job for health reasons and then became deputy director of the children's hospital. He is said to suffer from heart problems and told his wife during the visit that his blood pressure was high but that he was being given medical treatment. His wife was reportedly reprimanded by officials for having reported the situation of her husband to people abroad. She was told that he was to be moved elsewhere today but was not told where. Dr González has had no access to a lawyer while in detention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People who leave Cuba without permission are generally considered by the Cuban Government to have betrayed the Cuban Revolution and are likely to face possible imprisonment if they return to Cuba, especially if they have held important posts. The hospital of which Dr González was deputy director before his departure from Cuba was a particularly prestigious one and was visited frequently by President Fidel Castro. Doctors are held in particularly high esteem in Cuba and are usually discouraged, if not prevented, from leaving

the country. People detained on State Security or military charges have few judicial guarantees. They are not normally permitted access to a lawyer until the initial investigation period, which can last several weeks or months, is over. During this period detainees are frequently subjected to heavy psychological pressures to agree with whatever the authorities are accusing them of.

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

- noting reports that Dr Omar González Martín was detained on 24 February as he was boarding a flight to Mexico;
- urging that he be immediately released unless charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- requesting that he be given immediate access to a lawyer of his choice and that his family be kept informed of his whereabouts;
- expressing concern that he suffers from a heart condition and requesting that he be given all necessary medical treatment while in detention.

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

Telexes: 511456 fisge

Faxes: + 53 7 333164

Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

2) Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr Roberto Robaina González
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 333085 / + 53 7 335261

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

3) 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

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

National Union of Jurists

Unión Nacional de Juristas de Cuba
Apartado 4161
La Habana 4, 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 20 April 1996.