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# **amnesty international**

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## **CUBA**

**One year later and four members of the 'Grupo de Trabajo' still imprisoned  
without being informed of any charges**

29 July 1998

AI INDEX: AMR 25/16/98

DISTR: SC/CO/GR

Over a year has passed since the detention on 16 July 1997 of **Félix A. Bonné Carcasés, René Gómez Manzano, Vladimiro Roca Antunes and Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**, four members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation. However, until now none of the detainees have been informed of any charges and no date has been set for a trial.

Amnesty International believes that all four prisoners have been detained for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience.

The four group members were arrested following a press conference for foreign journalists which took place on 27 June 1997 during which they criticized an official discussion document -- "*El Partido de la Unidad, la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos que Defendemos*", "The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights which we Defend" -- which was being circulated within the country as a prelude to the Communist Party Congress. They also gave the journalists a copy of their own critique of the document entitled "*La Patria es de Todos*", "The Homeland is for Everyone". Following the arrests, the Cuban authorities reportedly told foreign diplomats that they had been arrested because they had carried out "intense activity aimed at subverting the judicial and constitutional order of the Republic of Cuba"; that they were seeking to disrupt local government elections; that they had released false information about the state of the Cuban economy; and that they had the logistical support of US diplomats in Havana. The Cuban Government also claimed that it had proof that the four were working with "leaders of terrorist groups based on US territory".

**Vladimiro Roca Antunes**, aged 55, is a specialist in international economic relations and the son of revolutionary hero and founding member of the Cuban Communist Party, Blas Roca. He is also a member of the organizing committee of the unofficial *Partido Social Demócrata Cubana (PSDC)*, Cuban Social Democratic Party, which seeks a peaceful transition to a democratic society and the rule of law. He has been subjected to frequent harassment because of his political beliefs. On 3 July 1997 stones were thrown at his house by individuals he believes were working for State Security. At the time of writing he is being held in Ariza Prison, Cienfuegos province. He reportedly suffers from high blood pressure. On 15 July 1998 he made a statement from prison:

"After one year of imprisonment with no charge nor explanation from the authorities about my legal situation, I do not aim to challenge the authorities nor look for a confrontation, since my position continues to be one of reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness, reunification of all

*Cubans and non-violence. We want to draw attention to our situation and demand a public trial, with the help of the foreign press in Cuba and the accredited diplomats .... A transparent and just trial so that President Castro's farewell words to Pope John Paul II will be true: 'Cuba does not know fear, it despises lies, listens with respect, believes in its ideas, unconditionally defends its principles and has nothing to hide'. If he really meant these words, then I trust that the trial will be carried out under the proposed conditions or that we are given a response and an adequate solution".*

*Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, aged 52, is an economist and the director of the unofficial Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, Cuban Institute of Independent Economists. She has been detained and threatened about her activities on several occasions in the past. Since July 1997 she has been held mainly at the Centro de Reeducación de Mujeres de Occidente, Womens' Reeducation Centre (known as "Manto Negro"), Havana, although she has spent some time in hospital: in October and November 1997 she was transferred to the Carlos J Finlay Hospital for several weeks and in June 1998 she was moved to the Marianao Military Hospital, where she is still believed to be held at the time of writing. Whilst in prison she has reportedly suffered from breast lumps, migraine, high blood pressure, skin rash, dizziness, vomiting, trembling and loss of weight.*

**René Gómez Manzano**, aged 54, worked for many years as a government lawyer before founding the independent lawyer's group *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, in 1990, which presses for reform of Cuba's political system and defends political cases. He was expelled from his lawyers' collective in 1995 after criticizing the national organization directing all lawyers' offices in Cuba. He has also been outspoken about a number of politically-sensitive court cases and, before his expulsion, had defended several prominent political prisoners. At the time of writing he is being held in Agüica Prison, Matanzas province.

**Félix A. Bonné Carcasés**, aged 59, is a former university professor (of engineering and physics) who was a founder member of the unofficial *Corriente Cívica Cubana*, Cuban Civic Current, a group of university professors seeking peaceful political change. He lost his job at Havana University in 1992 as a result of the group's activities. He has been detained and harassed on several occasions. He suffers from asthma, diabetes and heart problems and is reportedly being provided with the necessary treatment for his asthma while in detention. He is currently being held in Guanajay Prison, Havana province.

### **Background Information**

Amnesty International believes that there are currently at least one hundred prisoners of conscience (POCs) in Cuba, imprisoned because of their attempts to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Some have been convicted for overtly political offences such as "rebellion", "enemy propaganda", "disrespect" or "dangerousness" while others have been convicted of more minor criminal offences. There are also believed to be some six hundred other political prisoners convicted of more serious offences such as "terrorism", "piracy", "sabotage" or "espionage", some of whom, despite the serious nature of the charges, may also be POCs. The rights of political detainees to a fair trial are severely limited, particularly in relation to adequate access to defence counsel, and lawyers, who are all employed by the Cuban State, are

often reluctant to seriously challenge the arguments put forward by the prosecutors and the Department of State Security, the security service usually responsible for investigating cases of a political nature. During the initial period of detention detainees are frequently held for weeks or months without access to a lawyer and subjected to psychological pressures to sign incriminating statements. Though they are usually permitted weekly family visits, these take place in the presence of an official and they are forbidden to talk about anything relating to the reasons for their detention or the treatment they are receiving.

The number of POCs in Cuban jails was reduced somewhat after Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in January 1998, after which 19 AI Cuban POCs were released, six of whom were forced to go into exile in Canada. The Vatican handed to the Cuban authorities a list of several categories of prisoners, including those who were sick, those who had been held for a long time and POCs. Subsequently, in February 1998, Castro announced that it would free about 300 prisoners. The exact amount of political prisoners released is not known, but it is believed to be around 100. Seventy of the political prisoners reportedly on the Vatican's list were not released on the grounds that they still posed a threat to national security or public safety. Thirteen of the prisoners released in February 1998 were AI POCs. A further 17 political prisoners were released in April and May on condition that they leave the country.

*Please send faxes/express and airmail letters preferably in Spanish. If not, in English or your own language:*

- Expressing concern that **Felix A. Bonne Carcasés, René Gómez Manzano, Vladimiro Roca Antunes** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello** have been detained solely for the non-violent exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association and that one year after their detention have still not been informed of any formal charges.
- Calling for their immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience.
- Urging that they be granted full judicial guarantees in accordance with international standards.
- Urging that all Cuban citizens be guaranteed their rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that the Cuban Government immediately cease to imprison, force into exile abroad or otherwise punish those who attempt to peacefully exercise such rights.

*Please send appeals to:*

**Head of State and Government**

Dr Fidel Castro Ruz

Presidente de los Consejos

de Estados y de Ministros

La Habana, Cuba

**Telex and Fax: via Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see below)**

**Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency**

**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**

**Fax: + 53 7 - 333164**

**Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General**

**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**

**Telex: 511122 / 511464 / 512950**

**Fax: + 53 7 - 333 085 / - 335 261**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

This document is sent to CARRAN coordinators for action by groups. It is also being sent to sections. Please check with the Caribbean Sub-Regional Team if sending appeals after 31 December 1998.

**KEYWORDS:** PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE1 / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS / CENSORSHIP /  
MEDICAL TREATMENT / DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL / PHOTOGRAPHS

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