

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 25/40/97

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Americas Regional Program
Date: 17 November 1997

Further information on MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

Dr Dési MENDOZA Rivero
CUBA
(See AMR 25/28/97, 19 August 1997)

Keywords

Theme: POC

Profession/association: doctor

Summary

Amnesty International is renewing its call for the release of Dr Dési Mendoza who was arrested in June 1997 and imprisoned, reportedly in connection with a critique he had made of the handling of a dengue fever epidemic in Santiago de Cuba in the east of the country. Dr Mendoza is due to be tried tomorrow (18 November 1997) on charges of violating Article 103 of the Penal Code, paragraph 3, concerning to the diffusion of "enemy propaganda" through the mass media. The prosecution is reported to be calling for a 15 year prison sentence. AI has adopted Dr Mendoza as a prisoner of conscience and will continue to regard him as such should he be convicted of a charge relating to freedom of expression.

Recommended Actions

Letters from medical professionals, preferably written in Spanish or your own language, should be sent urgently to the addresses below. If you have written previously on this case you should mention it.

- o urge that the trial of Dr Dési Mendoza of Santiago de Cuba be immediately discontinued
- o express concern at his state of health (you could note that he reportedly has cardiac problems and, more recently, kidney stones and blood in his urine);
- o ask for details of his current situation and for details of any medical care he is receiving
- o urge the immediate release of Dr Mendoza on the grounds that he should not be prosecuted for exercising his right to freedom of expression

Addresses

Sr. Roberto Robaina González (Minister of Foreign Affairs)
 Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
 Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
 Calzada No. 360
 Vedado
 La Habana, Cuba
 Fax: +53 7 333085 +53 7 335261
 (Salutation: Señor Ministro)

Dr. Juan Escalona Reguera (Attorney General of the Republic)
 Fiscal General de la (State Prosecutor)
 República
 Fiscalía General de la
 República
 San Rafael 3
 La Habana, Cuba
 Tl: + 53 7 333164 / 320411
 Fax: + 53 7 333164
 (Salutation: Señor Fiscal General)

Sr. Director (Director of Boniato Prison)
 Prisión de Boniato
 Apartado 5007
 Puerto de Boniato
 Santiago de Cuba
 Cuba
 (Salutation: Sr. Director)

Faxes and telephone calls expressing serious concern about Dr Mendoza could be made to the Embassy of Cuba in your country.

Please send copies of your letters to:

Sr. Carlos Dotres Martínez (Minister of Public Health)
 Ministro de la Salud Pública
 Ministerio de la Salud Pública
 Calle 23, No. 301
 Vedado, La Habana, Cuba
 Tl: 511149
 (Salutation: Señor Ministro)

and to the Cuban diplomatic representative in your country, or if there is not one, then to the nearest one.

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FURTHER INFORMATION ON IMPRISONED DOCTOR

Dr Desi MENDOZA Rivero
CUBA
(See AMR 25/28/97, 19 August 1997)

Amnesty International has received reports that Dr Desi Mendoza Rivero, aged 43 and married with four children, is to be tried at the *Tribunal Provincial Popular* in Santiago de Cuba on Tuesday 18 November 1997 on charges of having violated Article 105 of the Penal Code, paragraph 3, which refers to the diffusion of "enemy propaganda" through the mass media. The prosecution is calling for a 15 year prison sentence. AI believes that no interpretation can be placed on these charges other than that he is being punished for comments on the management of the dengue virus outbreak in eastern Cuba. The organization is urging the Cuban authorities to terminate this prosecution and immediately release Dr Mendoza.

Background

Dr Mendoza was detained on 25 June 1997 in Santiago de Cuba in the east of the country and taken to the State Security headquarters at Versailles. On 12 August 1997 he was transferred to Aguadores Prison, also in Santiago de Cuba, and later to Boniato prison. In the absence of official information, unofficial sources attributed his detention to statements he had made regarding an epidemic of dengue fever in Santiago de Cuba which, according to him, had caused several deaths. He reportedly accused the authorities of covering up the true extent of the epidemic and of not taking sufficient measures to control it.

Dr Mendoza established the *Colegio Médico Independiente de Santiago de Cuba* (Santiago de Cuba Independent Medical Association, of which he is president) in 1994. It is an unofficial organization which is not recognized by the Cuban authorities. Journalist Juan Carlos Céspedes of the *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO)*, Oriente Free Press Agency, based in Santiago de Cuba, was also arrested, on 12 June 1997, and reportedly questioned about an article he wrote on the dengue epidemic. He was released on 18 June and it is not clear if he is facing charges. Another APLO journalist, Daisy Carcasés Valle, who wrote about the dengue epidemic, was detained briefly on 15 August 1997 and threatened with imprisonment.

At the time of his arrest Dr Mendoza was reported to have uncontrolled hypertension (*presión arterial descontrolada*) with a cardiac arrhythmia—conditions which make exertion and stress highly undesirable. In early November, he was reported to be in pain and was taken by guards to the prison medical facility in Boniato prison; he was later transferred, handcuffed and guarded by five agents, to the Provincial Hospital of Saturnino Loral, in Reparto Sueño in Santiago de Cuba. Dr Mendoza was examined by ultrasound and given other tests. The diagnosis is that he is suffering from renal calculus and infection. In addition he is vomiting and losing blood

in his urine. Dr Mendoza is currently held in Boniato Prison hospital. Amnesty International adopted Dr Mendoza as a prisoner of conscience and continues to seek his immediate and unconditional release from prison.