

EXTRA 161/99 Prisoners of conscience / Arbitrary arrests

12 November 1999

CUBA Dr. Oscar Elías BISCET GONZÁLEZ, human rights activist
Antonio ALONSO PÉREZ, peasant leader
Ramón Humberto COLÁS CASTILLO, independent librarian and political
activist
Héctor PALACIOS RUIZ, political activist
At least a dozen others

More than 20 dissidents arrested in the run up to the IX Ibero-American Summit¹ in Havana on 15-16 November 1999 are still detained. Many more are currently under house arrest. After President Fidel Castro yesterday warned dissidents against organizing protests around the summit and said that nobody has impunity, Amnesty International is concerned that more will be arrested and that, under harsh new legislation aimed at silencing dissent, they face the prospect of long prison terms.

According to reports, Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, president of the *Fundación Lawton de Derechos Humanos*, Lawton Foundation for Human Rights, and three others involved in organizing a protest march in the capital on 10 November, have been arrested. The place of detention of Dr. Biscet, whose arrest took place on 3 November, is not known. The march was prevented from taking place by government supporters who reportedly beat and kicked dissidents. Several protesters were also detained by State Security agents. The march was to protest alleged human rights abuses by the government and to ask for the release of political prisoners.

On 7 November, Antonio Alonso Pérez, President of the *Alianza Nacional de Agricultores Independientes*, Association of Independent Farmers, was detained as he set out to participate in a congress of independent farmers in Matanzas province, to which Presidents and Chancellors attending the Ibero-American Summit had been invited. His brother was apparently told that he is under investigation.

Ramón Humberto Colás Castillo, a contributor to the independent press agency *Cuba Press*, an independent librarian and a member of the *Partido Solidaridad Democrático (PSD)*, Democratic Solidarity Party, was detained on 8 November. Héctor Palacios Ruiz, another PSD member, was detained on 12 November, the day he was due to participate in a meeting of dissidents.

The mothers of three political prisoners, who participated in a peaceful demonstration calling for the release of political prisoners, reportedly remain in detention following their arrest on 8 November.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Dr. Oscar Biscet is believed to have been detained more than a dozen times in the last year for his involvement in anti-government protests and meetings.

In August, Ramón Humberto Colás Castillo and his wife and two children were evicted from their home by the government. He was also temporarily arrested. He and his wife, Berta Mexidor, founded the first independent library in Cuba.

¹This is an annual meeting attended by governments of Latin America, Spain and Portugal.

In 1997 Héctor Palacios Ruiz served an 18 month prison sentence for "disrespect" (see AMR 25/35/97, October 1997).

In February this year, Cuba's National Assembly passed tough new legislation (Law 88) aimed at combating political dissent. Under the "*Ley de Protección de la Independencia Nacional y la Economía de Cuba*", "Law for the Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba", dissidents and journalists deemed to be working against the state risk 20 years' imprisonment.

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

- expressing concern, in the run up to the Ibero-American Summit, at the arrests of more than two dozen dissidents;
- urging that all those still detained in connection with the summit be released unless charged with a recondizably criminal offence;
- requesting that Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, Antonio Alonso Pérez, Ramón Humberto Colás Castillo and Héctor Palacios Ruiz be immediately and unconditionally released on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully attempting to exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- urging that all those detained be granted immediate access to lawyers of their choosing.

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

Faxes: + 53 7 57 07 95

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 335261 / 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 26 November 1999.