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## **Sharp rise in harassment and attacks against activists and journalists in Cuba**

Harassment and detention of political dissidents, human rights activists, journalists and bloggers across Cuba has risen sharply over the past 24 months, Amnesty International said in a new report published today.

The report *Routine repression: Political short-term detentions and harassment in Cuba*, reveals new tactics by the Cuban authorities to punish individuals seen as opposed to the regime.

According to the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation, there were 2,784 incidents of human rights abuses between January and September 2011, mostly short-term detention of dissidents - that's 710 more than in the whole of 2010.

Since March 2011, more than 65 independent journalists were detained, most of them repeatedly.

"Tactics have changed but the repression in Cuba is as strong as ever," said Gerardo Ducos, Cuba researcher at Amnesty International. "After the mass release of prisoners of conscience in 2011, we have seen authorities sharpening their strategy to silence dissent by harassing activists and journalists with short term detentions and public acts of repudiation."

Authorities in Cuba do not tolerate any criticism of state policies outside the official mechanisms established under government control. Laws on "public disorder", "contempt", "disrespect", "dangerousness" and "aggression", are used to prosecute government opponents. No political or human rights organizations are allowed to obtain legal status.

Human rights activists or independent journalists detained are usually held for periods ranging from a few hours to several days in police stations or detention centres, during which time they are frequently subjected to interrogations, intimidation, threats and, occasionally, beatings.

In many cases, authorities fail to inform their relatives of the reasons or the place of detention of their loved ones.

Human rights activists Antonio Michel and Marcos MáiqueLima Cruz have been imprisoned since 25 December 2010, when they were arrested by officials from the Department of State Security in their home town Holguín in eastern Cuba after signing songs criticizing the lack of freedom of expression in the country.

Following a summary trial in May 2011, the brothers were sentenced to two and three years imprisonment respectively for "insulting symbols of the homeland" and "public disorder".

Antonio Michel is suffering from prostate problems and is reportedly not receiving adequate medical

treatment. He is also eligible for conditional release having served more than half of his sentence, but the authorities have refused to respond to petitions from his family and lawyer.

Amnesty International has adopted them as “prisoners of conscience” and called on the authorities for their immediate and unconditional release. Human rights activists Yasmín Conyedo Riverón and her husband Yusmani Rafael Álvarez Esmori, in detention since 8 January 2012 on trumped up charges of using “violence or intimidation” against a state official, have also been named “prisoners of conscience”.

Journalist José Alberto Álvarez Bravo, from Havana, was detained 15 times between April and October 2011 – an average of twice a month. On 12 July, State Security officials detained him at his house and confiscated his computer, USB flash drives, a digital camera, books and documents. He remained in detention for more than 72 hours.

“Cuba has seen worsening repression when it comes to human rights. What we want to see happening is for activists to be able to carry out their legitimate work without the fear of reprisals,” said Gerardo Ducos.