

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: PRE 01/282/2010
17 August 2010

Cuba: Campaign against mother of dead hunger striker must end

The Cuban authorities must act to end the harassment of the mother of a prisoner of conscience who died following a hunger strike to push for the release of other prisoners, Amnesty International said today.

Reina Luisa Tamayo, whose son Orlando Zapata Tamayo died in February this year, told Amnesty International she has been repeatedly harassed by authorities and government supporters during the regular marches she carries out in the town of Banes, in memory of her son.

“Reina Luisa Tamayo is simply paying tribute to her son who died in tragic circumstances, and that must be respected by the authorities” said Kerrie Howard, Amnesty International’s Americas Deputy Director.

Every Sunday Reina Luisa Tamayo, who is usually accompanied by relatives and friends, walks from her home to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad, to attend mass, from where they march to the cemetery, where Orlando is buried.

On Sunday 15 August, government supporters arrived early in the morning and surrounded her house, Reina Luisa Tamayo told Amnesty International, preventing her and her relatives and friends from marching and attending mass at the church.

Ahead of the march, Cuban security forces also allegedly detained some of the women due to attend in their homes for up to 48 hours, without any explanation being given for the measure.

Reina Luisa told Amnesty International that six loudspeakers were installed near her house and were used to shout slogans against her and the Ladies in White, an organization of female relatives of prisoners of conscience campaigning for their release.

On 8 August, Reina Luisa Tamayo was confronted by government supporters, who blocked her path and, according to her recount, beat relatives and friends of the family. She said a police patrol was parked nearby watching the events, but failed to intervene.

Amnesty International has also expressed its concern at a series of recent detentions by the police of independent journalists and dissidents.

Writer Luis Felipe Rojas Rozabal was detained by the police at 7am on 16 August, at his home in the town of San Germán, province of Holguín.

Luis Felipe’s family is unaware of the reasons of his arrest, but they have said they suspect this might be related to his criticism of the government. He has been arbitrarily detained on several previous occasions in similar circumstances.

Several members of the Eastern Democratic Alliance, a network of political dissident organizations, have also been detained.

“At a time when the Cuban government has begun to release prisoners of conscience, the campaign of harassment against Reina Luisa Tamayo and the arbitrary detention of journalists and dissident figures shows that the authorities are yet to make significant progress on human rights”, said Kerrie Howard.

Background

In March 2003, Orlando Zapata Tamayo was arrested and, a year later, sentenced to three years in prison for “disrespect”, “public disorder” and “resistance”. This was the first of a series of convictions for “disobedience” and “disorder in a penal establishment”.

Orlando was one of dozens of prisoners of conscience adopted by Amnesty International in Cuba at the time. The majority were among the 75 people arrested as part of the massive March 2003 crackdown by authorities against political activists.

In early December 2009, Orlando started a hunger strike to campaign for the release of prisoners of conscience held in Cuba. He died on 23 February 2010.

Currently there are at least 30 prisoners of conscience in Cuba’s jails. Amnesty international calls for their immediate and unconditional release.