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Exmo. Sr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota
Ministro de Estado
Ministério das Relações Exteriores
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20/01/2012

Dear Minister,

TRIP OF CUBAN BLOGGER YOANI SÁNCHEZ TO BRAZIL

Amnesty International is writing to you in relation with the invitation received by Yoani Sánchez to visit Brazil in February to attend a documentary festival in the state of Bahía about freedom of expression in Cuba and Honduras and in which she features.

Yoani Sánchez is an active blogger in Cuba and a prominent voice of the Cuban civil society who has been repeatedly calling in recent years to end the restrictions to the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and the freedom of movement within and outside Cuba. In her blog, *Generación Y*, she writes about daily life in the island and on the restrictions faced by the Cuban people to fully enjoy their political and civil rights.

Cuban laws excessively limit freedom of movement of its citizens and Cubans wishing to travel abroad must obtain an exit permit called *tarjeta blanca* (white card). In the last four years, Yoani Sánchez requested an exit permit to the Cuban authorities in eighteen occasions. The Migration and Immigration Directorate (*Dirección de Migración y Extranjería*) routinely denied her requests even though she had a valid passport and valid visas to the countries where she would be travelling. In every occasion, the authorities did not provide the reasons for the refusal. On 13 October 2009, Amnesty International called on the Cuban authorities to lift the travel restrictions on Ms. Sánchez preventing her from travelling to New York to receive an international journalism award. In 2008, she was also barred from traveling to Spain to collect the Ortega y Gasset Prize for digital journalism.

Amnesty International believes that the Cuban government is using the denial of exit permits as a punitive measure against government critics and dissidents. In previous occasions, the organization had denounced Cuba's restrictions on freedom of movement and on the right to leave or return to one's own country, restrictions that are systematically applied to government critics. The most recent cases include Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, leader of the Liberation Christian Movement (*Movimiento Cristiano Liberación*), the Ladies in White (*Damas de Blanco*) and Guillermo Fariñas who were barred from

travelling to Strasbourg to collect the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2002, 2005 and 2010 respectively.

We are asking today the Brazilian authorities their support to Yoani Sánchez so the Cuban authorities do not prevent her for a fourth time to visit your country. President Dilma Rousseff's planned visit to Cuba on 31 January is an opportunity to promote the idea that regional integration and cooperation between countries cannot be achieved if people are not allowed to move freely.

Amnesty International believes that such an important visit should also be the opportunity for calling on the Cuban government to initiate without delay the migration and other reforms it promised in 2011 and allow Cubans to enjoy their right to travel abroad and to return to their own country.

Therefore, Amnesty International respectfully requests your assistance to:

- Instruct the Brazilian authorities in La Habana to issue urgently to Ms. Sánchez with the Brazilian visa she is currently awaiting for then engage with the Cuban authorities to get the Cuban exit permit;
- Ensure that our call will be presented to President Rousseff ahead of her visit to Cuba and thus ensure that the situation of human rights in Cuba will be fully and openly discussed by representatives of Cuba in Brazil during this visit.

I cannot stress enough how valuable our organization would view your collaboration and we are looking forward to further engaging with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Atila Roque', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Atila Roque
Executive Director
Amnesty Internacional - Brazil