

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 25/007/2003

UA 79/03

Possible prisoners of conscience

19 March 2003

CUBA

Over two dozen dissidents

On 18 March, over two dozen possible prisoners of conscience were detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Their current whereabouts are unknown and they could face up to 20 years in prison under harsh legislation introduced in 1999.

In a rare event, the Cuban government reportedly announced their detention on national television and accused them of being linked to "*actividades conspirativas*", "acts of conspiracy" by James Cason, the Head of the US Interests Section in Havana. The official communiqué stated that they would be tried and brought to justice and that the laws against "*complicidad con el enemigo*" "complicity with the enemy" were still in force and could be used.

According to human rights defenders in Cuba, all the detainees are known dissidents and were arrested in Havana and the provinces. They include: Osvaldo Alfonso (m), Pedro Argüelles Morán (m), Luis Cino (m), Roberto de Miranda (m), Orlando Fundora (m), José Ramón Gabriel Castillo (m), Miguel Galbán (m), Edel José García Díaz (m), José Luis García Paneque (m), Léster González (m), Ricardo González Alfonso (m), Iván Hernández Carrillo (m), Librado Linares (m), Jorge Olivera (m), Enrique Pérez (m), Arturo Pérez de Alejo (m), José Antonio Pérez Morell (m), José Ramón (m), Omar Rodríguez Saludes (m), Ariel (m) and Miguel Sigler Amaya (m) and ten others.

Earlier in March, President Castro had criticised James Cason, the Head of the US Interests Section, for visiting the home of dissident and former prisoner of conscience, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, and making declarations to the press.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In February 1999 Cuba's National Assembly passed tough legislation (Law 88), called 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. The law calls for seven to 15 years' imprisonment for passing information to the United States that could be used to bolster anti-Cuban measures such as the US economic blockade. This would rise to 20 years if the information is acquired surreptitiously. The legislation also bans the ownership, distribution or reproduction of subversive materials from the US government, and proposes terms of imprisonment of up to five years for collaborating with radio and TV stations and publications deemed to be assisting US policy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern at the recent arrests of over two dozen Cuban dissidents who could be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- urging that they be either released or tried according to international standards;
- urging that they be granted immediate access to lawyers of their choosing and any necessary medical assistance.

APPEALS TO (Please note, fax numbers to Cuba can be unreliable. Please send your faxes via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs):

President

Su Excelencia
Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz
Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros
La Habana, Cuba
Telegram: President Castro, La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +53 7 333085 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Salutation: Su Excelencia/ Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Felipe Pérez Roque
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Calzada No. 360
Vedado
La Habana, Cuba
Telegram: Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +53 7 333085
E-mail: cubaminrex@minrex.gov.cu
Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

Interior Secretary

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra
Ministerio del Interior y Prisiones
Ministerio del Interior
Plaza de la Revolución
La Habana, Cuba
Telegram: Ministerio del Interior, La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +53 7 333085 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Sr. Jacinto Granda de Laserna
Director, *Diario 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 30 April 2003.