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JOINT STATEMENT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES

Cuba: Scores of prisoners of conscience, including two journalists, still in prison two months after Pope's visit

While Amnesty International and *Reporters sans Frontières* welcomed the recent release of some 90 political prisoners following the Pope's visit to Cuba in January, both organizations are concerned that scores of prisoners of conscience, including two journalists, are still imprisoned just for expressing opinions contrary to the government or for belonging to unofficial groups.

Given the limitations on human rights monitoring, the precise number of prisoners of conscience is difficult to ascertain but respected human rights monitors in Cuba put the figure at at least 200.

Both organizations are calling on the Cuban Government to release immediately and unconditionally all prisoners of conscience and to permit all Cuban citizens, including journalists attempting to operate outside of the state-controlled media, to establish independent organizations and to peacefully express their opinions without interference from the authorities.

The two organizations are particularly concerned about the situation of the following three journalists working with independent press agencies:

- Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, aged 33, the founder of *Línea Sur Press*, an independent press agency, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in November 1997 by a court in Cienfuegos. He was accused of showing disrespect towards President Fidel Castro and Vice-President Carlos Lage after accusing them of being liars in an interview he gave to a US-based radio station. He is imprisoned in Cienfuegos Provincial Prison in Ariza. In early February, he was reportedly warned by prison guards to stop associating with other political prisoners.
- Lorenzo Páez Núñez, a former mathematics teacher and correspondent in Artemisa, Havana province, of the *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba (BPIC)*, Bureau of Independent Cuban Journalists, was sentenced on 11 July 1997 to 18 months' imprisonment on charges of defamation and showing disrespect towards the police in connection with statements made to a US-based radio station. He reportedly had no legal representation at his trial, which took place the day after his arrest. He is believed to be serving his sentence in a prison in Pinar del Río.
- Juan Carlos Recio Martínez, aged 29, a correspondent with the independent press agency *Cuba Press* in Villa Clara, is currently at liberty pending the outcome of an appeal against the one-year sentence of "correctional work without internment" which was

imposed on him following his trial on 13 February. He was charged with “other acts against State Security” after failing to denounce to the authorities plans by another man to distribute a leaflet calling on people not to vote at the local elections in October 1997. If his sentence is confirmed, he will reportedly be expected to carry out his sentence at an agricultural production cooperative in Villa Clara province.

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