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Cuba: release of dissidents -- a positive initial step

The release of prisoners of conscience Felix A. Bonne Carcasés and Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello could mark a positive step towards greater respect for human rights in Cuba, Amnesty International said today.

The two, members of the Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, were arrested in July 1997 along with two other group members, Vladimiro Roca Antúnez and René Gómez Manzano, after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party.

All four were sentenced in March 1999 to between three and a half and five years imprisonment on a charge of *sedición*, 'sedition', under State Security legislation. Both Vladimiro Roca Antúnez and René Gómez Manzano remain imprisoned.

"The organization will continue to press for the release of Vladimiro Roca Antúnez and René Gómez Manzano and for further measures to be taken that will ensure that the peaceful exercise of civil and political rights is not criminally sanctioned in Cuba," Amnesty International said.

"At present dissidents -- including journalists, political opponents and human rights defenders -- continue to suffer severe harassment," the organization continued. Several hundred people, at least 25 of whom are currently identified by Amnesty International as being prisoners of conscience, remain imprisoned for political offences.

The organization has repeatedly sought the immediate and unconditional release of all those imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

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For more information, or to receive a copy of Amnesty International's latest report on Cuba "Short Term Detention and Harassment of Dissidents", please call the Amnesty International press office on +44 20 7413 5562.