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PUBLIC STATEMENT

CUBA

Cuban Government must free prisoners of conscience

On the first anniversary of the arrest and detention of four leading critics of the Cuban government, Amnesty International reiterates its call for their immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully expressing views that are contrary to Cuban Government policy.

Félix A. Bonné Carcasés, René Gomez Manzano, Vladimir Roca Antunes and Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, four members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, *Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation*, arrested in Havana on 16 July 1997, remain in detention.

They were arrested following a press conference for foreign journalists during which they criticized an official discussion document -- *The Party of Unity, Democracy and the Human Rights We Defend* -- which is being circulated within the country as a prelude to the Communist Party Congress. They also presented to the journalists their own analysis of the document -- *The Homeland is for Everyone*.

All four are awaiting trial on charges which are believed to include "enemy propaganda" -- which carries a maximum prison sentence of fifteen years. Date and formal charges for their trial are unknown.

Félix A. Bonné Carcasés is believed to be detained in Guanajay Prison, Havana Province; René Gomez Manzano, a lawyer, is believed to be held in Agüica Prison; Vladimir Roca Antunes, is believed to be held in Ariza Prison, Cienfuegos Province, and Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello is currently held in a military hospital because of her state of health.

Background:

In 1995 the Cuban Government began a major crackdown on dissidents, following the formation of *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Concilium, a forum of over 100 unofficial groups, including human rights groups, independent professional associations and political parties. Since then, members of *Concilio Cubano* and journalists working for independent organizations have been subjected to persistent harassment and frequent short-term detention. They have also been threatened with long-term imprisonment -- and occasionally with physical violence -- if they do not cease their activities or leave the country. A few have been brought to trial and imprisoned.