

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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PRIORITY

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Prisoner of Conscience/Legal Concern

23 August 1991

CUBA: María Celina RODRIGUEZ (female)

Amnesty International is concerned about the arrest on 2 August 1991 in Havana of María Celina Rodríguez. It believes her to be a prisoner of conscience.

María Celina Rodríguez is the president of an unofficial group called Libertad y Fe, Freedom and Faith, which advocates greater freedom of religion.

She is reported to have announced publicly that she intended to make statements to the press about "the real situation of the country" during the Pan-american Games which began on 30 July in Cuba. Her arrest is believed to have taken place on 2 August as she was about to address a group of foreign journalists.

She was taken first to the Havana headquarters of the Departamento de Seguridad del Estado (DSE), Department of State Security which is known as Villa Marista, where she was reportedly held in incommunicado detention for 11 days before being transferred to Havana Psychiatric Hospital. According to Cuban law, detainees can be referred to psychiatric institutions for tests in order to establish whether they are fit to stand trial. This procedure has in the past been open to abuse, particularly in the case of political prisoners. María Celina Rodríguez's three-year-old son who was with her when she was detained, is believed to have been handed over to relatives by DSE officials.

On 22 July 1991, DSE officials reportedly searched her home. They threatened to take her son away and to evict her from the building which is said to be in a dangerous state and in which she is apparently living illegally. Another local state official is said to have recently made threats against her life.

Amnesty International believes that María Celina Rodríguez is a prisoner of conscience detained for peacefully trying to express her views. The organization is also concerned that she may not have access to lawyers. Detainees being held by the DSE or in psychiatric institutions often do not have access to a lawyer until after they have been transferred to prison, sometimes several weeks or months after arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent weeks, apparently in preparation for the Pan-american Games during which an unusually large number of foreigners were expected in the country, the authorities have set up "Rapid Response Brigades (Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida)", for which ordinary citizens have been asked to volunteer. These groups, together with the security forces and Communist Party organizations, appear to be under explicit instructions to crack down on any signs of unrest or dissidence. Several reports have been received of known dissidents, including human rights activists, being verbally and physically attacked in the street and in some cases being detained for several hours before being released with warnings to cease their "counter-revolutionary" activities. At least one

Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba

Telexes: 511456 fisge

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Señor Jefe del Cuartel General del
Departamento de Seguridad del Estado (DSE)

Señor Jefe

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(5)

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and to diplomatic representatives of Cuba in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 October 1991.