

CUBA

Current prisoners of conscience must be released

This document details all the cases of people currently declared by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience¹. It can also serve as an update to the previous document “*Cuba: Some releases but repression and imprisonment continue*”, AMR 25/05/99, which only mentioned cases of prisoners of conscience detained since January 1997. Amnesty International believes that there are more prisoners of conscience in Cuba than those mentioned below and is currently investigating further cases. However, detailed information about cases is difficult to obtain due to the fact that the Cuban authorities do not publicise information on the prison population and restrictions on human rights monitoring in Cuba are very severe. The monitoring of telephone calls and mail by the Cuban authorities, as well as the lack of access to the country for Amnesty International and other major human rights organizations, means that researching human rights violations in Cuba is very difficult and reports are often hard to verify.

Prisoners of conscience in Cuba are normally imprisoned because of their attempts to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Some have been convicted for overtly political offences and in other cases, instead of bringing overtly political charges against them, the authorities choose to imprison them on minor criminal charges, sometimes trumped up, in order to disguise the political motivation for their arrest. There are also believed to be many other political prisoners who have been convicted of more serious offences (sometimes involving violence). The rights of political detainees to a fair trial are severely limited, particularly in relation to adequate access to defence counsel. In addition, lawyers, who are all employed by the Cuban State, are often reluctant to seriously challenge the arguments put forward by the prosecutors and the Department of State Security. During the initial period of detention detainees are frequently held for weeks or months without access to a lawyer and subjected to psychological pressures to sign incriminating statements. Others are tried so soon after their detention that they do not have time to find a lawyer or if they do, their lawyer does not have time to prepare a defence.

In Cuba freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited in law and in practice. Those who attempt to express views or organize meetings or form organizations that conflict with government policy and/or the aims of the socialist state are likely to be subjected to punitive measures including short term detentions, interrogations, harassment, loss of employment, eviction, restrictions on travel, house searches, threats, intimidation, phone bugging and sometimes imprisonment.

Amnesty International believes that the following seventeen people are prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their peaceful attempts to exercise their rights to

¹ These are people who are imprisoned by reason of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or by reason of their ethnic origin, sex, colour or language, provided they have not used or advocated violence.

freedom of expression, association and assembly, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release:

Marcelo Amelo Rodríguez

Marcelo Amelo Rodríguez, aged 50, was detained on 19 February 1993 along with three others, all of whom have now been released (**Alexis Leyva Álvarez**, **Rafael Ugás Aguilera** and **Angel Luis Valiente Laugart**). All four detainees were reportedly charged with “*rebelión*”, “rebellion”, because they had printed material stating that the 1993 elections were fraudulent. Marcelo Amelo Rodríguez was sentenced to eight year’s imprisonment. He was conditionally released on 13 April 1996, on condition that he left the country; however he reportedly could not get the money needed to do so. The same year, he formed a human rights group of political prisoners and ex-prisoners *Geraldo Gonzalez “El Hermano de la Fé”*, Geraldo Gonzalez “The Brother of Faith”. On 3 June 1997 he was re-arrested and his conditional freedom was revoked. He is currently imprisoned in *Prisión de Boniato*, Boniato Prison, Santiago de Cuba province, where he was and may still be in a punishment cell. He is reportedly suffering from problems with his kidneys and hypertension.

Bernardo Arévalo Padrón

Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, aged 34, the director of *Línea Sur Press*, an independent press agency based in Cienfuegos, was detained on 14 August 1997 and held for three days. His trial subsequently took place on 28 November 1997. He was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for “*desacato*”, “disrespect”, which was confirmed on appeal. He was accused of showing disrespect towards President Fidel Castro and Vice-President Carlos Lage after calling them liars in an interview he gave to a US-based radio station. Bernardo Arévalo Padrón is currently being held in the *Prisión Provincial de Cienfuegos*, Cienfuegos Provincial Prison, Ariza, Cienfuegos province, where in April 1998 he was beaten, reportedly because it was mistakenly believed that he had distributed anti-government propaganda within the prison. According to reports, as a result of the beatings he was left with a swollen face, his body was badly bruised, and he suffered from loss of memory throughout the year.

Félix A Bonne Carcasés

Félix A. Bonne Carcasés, aged 59, is a former university professor and member 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. He was detained on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**René Gómez Manzano**, **Vladimiro Roca Antúnez** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with “*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*”, “other acts against state security”, in relation to a crime of “*sedición*”, “sedition”. Félix Antonio Bonne Carcasés was

sentenced to four years' imprisonment and is currently being held in *Prisión de Guanajay*, Guanajay Prison, Havana province.

Victor Bressler Villazan and Emilio Bressler Cisneros

Victor Bressler Villazan, aged 58, and his son **Emilio Bressler Cisneros**, aged 32, were members of an unofficial group called *Nueva Generación*, New Generation, as well as a group of intellectuals and independent writers, known as *El Grupo*, The Group, formed by Cecilio Ismael Sombra Haber, which was closed down by the authorities. Several members of *El Grupo* were detained but Victor and Emilio Bressler are the only two members who have not been released.

Victor Bressler Villazan and his son, Emilio Bressler Cisneros, were detained on 20 February 1993 and 15 March 1993 respectively. Both were tried on 1 and 2 July 1993. Victor Bressler Villazan was charged with "*rebelión*", "rebellion" and "*propaganda enemiga*", "enemy propaganda" and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, reportedly for suspicion of rebellion and for being a member of a dissident group and distributing flyers. Victor Bressler Villazan is currently imprisoned in *Campamento Joturo-Bolango*, Santiago de Cuba province. Emilio Bressler Cisneros was charged with "enemy propaganda" and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment, reportedly for having distributed flyers. He is reportedly serving his sentence in *Prisión de Boniato*, Boniato Prison, Santiago de Cuba province, and is said to have been hospitalised for one month in October 1998.

Francisco Chaviano González

Francisco Chaviano González, aged 46, was detained on 7 May 1994. He was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment in April 1995, charged with "*revelación de secretos concernientes a la seguridad del Estado*", "revealing state security secrets", "*revelación de secretos administrativos*", "revealing administrative secrets", and "*falsificación de documentos públicos*", "falsifying public documents". Amnesty International believes that the real reason for Francisco Chaviano's arrest and imprisonment was his activities as President of the unofficial *Consejo Nacional por los Derechos Civiles en Cuba (CNDCC)*, National Council for Civil Rights in Cuba. Moments before his arrest, a person unknown to him had reportedly handed him a compromising document which was used by State Security agents as a pretext for detaining him. During the trial, an attorney representing one of the other defendants demanded to see the document but was not permitted access as it was classified as "secret" even though it was used in evidence against the defendants. In a letter smuggled out of prison, Francisco Chaviano alleged that on the morning of the trial his food was drugged causing him to experience difficulties when attempting to address the court. He is currently being held in *Prisión Combinado del Este*, Combinado del Este Prison, La Habana province. He is said to be suffering from a duodenal ulcer, arthritis and breathing problems. He was also said to have been beaten on 17 June 1999 and suffered injuries to the face and head and a fractured tibia. He has undertaken several hunger strikes.

Julio César Coizeau Rizo

Julio César Coizeau Rizo, aged 24, was detained on 30 October 1997. He was brought to trial on 28 April 1998, charged with “*desacato*”, "disrespect", to President Fidel Castro, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. The charge was brought against him for having written anti-government slogans in different places, which he did not deny at his trial. He was reportedly angry with the government for not investigating the disappearance of his brother, Luis Alberto Coizeau Rizo, who suffers from schizophrenia and left home on 23 November 1996 leaving a note saying that he would try to leave the country via Guantánamo, but never returned. Julio César Coizeau Rizo is currently serving his sentence in *Prisión de Aguadores*, Aguadores Prison, Santiago de Cuba province.

Jesús Joel Díaz Hernández

Jesús Joel Díaz Hernández, aged 25, is executive director of the independent press agency *Cooperativa Avileña de Periodistas Independientes*, Cooperative of Independent Journalists of Ciego de Avila. He was detained on 18 January 1999, tried the following day and sentenced to four years' imprisonment for "*peligrosidad*", "dangerousness". Jesús Díaz's trial reportedly did not conform to international standards of fairness, particularly since his lawyer had inadequate time to prepare his defence. He is currently imprisoned in the *Prisión Provincial de Ciego de Avila*, Ciego de Avila Provincial Prison (nicknamed "Canaleta"). He has reportedly been on two hunger strikes since his detention and is reportedly in a poor state of health, having lost a lot of weight.

René Gómez Manzano

René Gómez Manzano, aged 55, is a lawyer and founder of the independent lawyers' group *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, and a member 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. He was detained on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **Vladimiro Roca Antúnez** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". René Gómez Manzano was sentenced to four years' imprisonment and is currently being held in *Prisión de Agüica*, Agüica Prison, Matanzas province.

Manuel Antonio González Castellanos

Manuel Antonio González Castellanos, aged 41, a reporter for the independent press agency *Cuba Press*, was detained on 1 October 1998 in Holguín and charged with “*desacato*”, “disrespect”. Later that day family members **Yoanis Caridad Varona González** and **Leonardo Varona González** (see below), as well as a visitor at the house, **Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez** (see below), were arrested. On 6 May 1999 the trial took place of Manuel González, Leonardo Varona, Yoanis Varona González and Roberto Rodríguez and all four defendants were convicted of “disrespect”. Manuel González was sentenced to two years and seven months’ imprisonment, which he is currently serving in the *Prisión Provincial de Holguín*, Holguín Provincial Prison. Yoanis Varona was sentenced to one and a half years’ restricted freedom.

Cecilio Monteagudo Sánchez

Cecilio Monteagudo Sánchez, aged 26, a member of the unofficial *Partido Solidaridad Democrático*, Democratic Solidarity Party, was detained on 15 September 1997. On 13 February 1998 he was convicted on a charge of “*propaganda enemiga*”, “enemy propaganda” and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment. The charges were made on the grounds that he wrote a leaflet calling on people not to vote in the local elections that were due to be held in October 1997. The leaflet was never printed or distributed. He is currently carrying out his sentence at the *Prisión de Guamajal*, Guamajal Prison, Villa Clara province.

Juan José Moreno Reyes

Juan José Moreno Reyes, aged 37, was detained on 15 September 1992, along with some 19 others. All the detainees, who were accused of belonging to an unofficial political group called “*Seguidores de Ochoa*”, “Followers of Ochoa”², were tried in March 1993. The charges brought against the group were “*rebelión*”, “rebellion”, and “*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*”, “other acts against state security”. Juan Moreno was sentenced to thirteen years’ imprisonment. It is believed that all the detainees have now been released, except for Juan José Moreno Reyes. The prosecution alleged that the group had printed and distributed around the province of Holguín leaflets which were critical of the government’s policies and that they had held clandestine meetings. Amnesty International has received no indication that any of the group had used or advocated violence. It believes that the authorities were particularly concerned about their activities at that time because the first direct elections to the *Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular*, National Assembly of People’s Power, were about to be held in February 1993. Juan Moreno is currently being held at the *Centro de Trabajo*, Work Camp, Playa Manteca, Mayarí, Holguín province.

Vladimiro Roca Antúnez

² General Arnaldo Ochoa and other senior military officials were tried in 1989 on charges of drug trafficking and smuggling. Ochoa and three others were sentenced to death and executed.

Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, aged 56, is a former pilot and a specialist in international economic relations, and member 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. He was detained on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **René Gómez Manzano** and **Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". Vladimiro Roca was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and is currently being held in the *Prisión Provincial de Cienfuegos*, Cienfuegos Provincial Prison, Cienfuegos province.

Orestes Rodríguez Horruitiner

Orestes Rodríguez Horruitiner, aged 46, acting president of the unofficial *Movimiento Seguidores de Chivás*, Followers of Chivás Movement, in Santiago de Cuba, was detained on 23 July 1997, reportedly after his home was searched and several leaflets, books and documents were found which were considered by the authorities to be counter-revolutionary. He was brought to trial on 11 November 1997, charged with "*propaganda enemiga*", "enemy propaganda", and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He is currently serving his sentence in *Prisión del Manguito*, El Manguito Prison, Santiago de Cuba province. He is reportedly in a poor state of health, suffering from a severe bursitis inflammation, hypertension and glaucoma.

Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez

Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez, aged 27, was detained on 2 October 1998 in Holguín and charged with "*desacato*", "disrespect". The day after the arrest of Manuel Antonio González Castellanos (see above), family members were reportedly subjected to an *acto de repudio* (act of repudiation)³. Their home was reportedly surrounded by several hundred people, reportedly lead by State Security agents and members of the *Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida*, Rapid Response Brigades⁴, who chanted threats and abuse. Government agents then arrested **Yoanis Caridad Varona González** and **Leonardo Varona González**, as well as a visitor at the

³ These are organized by government officials and involve being verbally abused and sometimes physically assaulted by government supporters.

⁴ These were set up in 1991 "to defend the country, the Revolution and socialism in all circumstances, by confronting and liquidating any sign of counter-revolution or crime" and were subsequently involved in numerous violent confrontations with dissidents. Their activities have appeared to be less frequent in recent years.

house, **Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez**. On 6 May 1999 the trial took place of Manuel González, Leonardo Varona, Yoanis Varona González and Roberto Rodríguez and all four defendants were convicted of "disrespect". Roberto Rodríguez was sentenced to one year and five months' imprisonment and is currently imprisoned in *Prisión Cuba Sí*, Holguín province.

Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello

Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, aged 53, is an economist and member 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. She was detained on 16 July 1997, along with three other members of the group (**Félix A. Bonne Carcasés**, **René Gómez Manzano** and **Vladimiro Roca Antúñez**) after issuing a critique of a document disseminated for the Fifth Congress of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Cuban Communist Party. On 23 September 1998 all four members were formally charged with "*otros actos contra la seguridad del estado*", "other acts against state security", in relation to a crime of "*sedición*", "sedition". Marta Beatriz Roque was sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment and was being held in the Centro de Reeducación de Mujeres de Occidente (nicknamed *Manto Negro*), Women's Re-education Centre, La Habana province, until 17 July 1999 when she was transferred to the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital, after beginning a fast consuming liquids only. On 2 September 1999 she reportedly began a full fast which she ceased after two days after negotiating with the authorities.

Leonardo Varona González

Leonardo Varona González, aged 24, an affiliate of *Santiago Press*, an independent news agency in the province of Santiago de Cuba, was detained on 2 October 1998 in Holguín and charged with "*desacato*", "disrespect". The day after the arrest of Manuel Antonio González Castellanos (see above), family members were reportedly subjected to an *acto de repudio* (act of repudiation). Their home was reportedly surrounded by several hundred people, reportedly led by State Security agents and members of the *Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida*, Rapid Response Brigades, who chanted threats and abuse. Government agents then arrested **Yoanis Caridad Varona González** and Leonardo Varona, as well as a visitor at the house, **Roberto Rodríguez Rodríguez**. On 6 May 1999 the trial took place of Manuel González, Leonardo Varona, Yoanis Varona González and Roberto Rodríguez and all four defendants were convicted of "disrespect". Leonardo Varona was sentenced to one year and four months' imprisonment. Leonardo Varona is the grandson of Lydia Doce, a martyr of the Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959. Shortly before his arrest, he reportedly made a statement to the Miami-based radio station, *La Voz*, The Voice, expressing his displeasure that a prison work camp had been named after Lydia Docs. Leonardo Varona is currently serving his sentence in the *Prisión Provincial de Holguín*, Holguín Provincial Prison.