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Cuba: Release five prisoners of conscience immediately

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The Cuban authorities must immediately and unconditionally release five men who have been named prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

The cases of the five men – Rafael Matos Montes de Oca, Emilio Planas Robert and the brothers Alexeis, Diango, and Vianco Vargas Martín – are indicative of the continuing repression of freedom of expression on the island, the organization said.

“These five cases are only the tip of the iceberg for Cuba’s repression of free speech,” said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor for Amnesty International.

“The only progress made by the Cuban government has been the reform of the Migration Law earlier this year. It allowed many people including human rights defenders and government critics to travel abroad. Much more needs to be done to guarantee civil and political liberties in the country.”

Emilio Planas Robert and Rafael Matos Montes de Oca Both have both been found guilty of peligrosidad (dangerousness, or “special proclivity to commit crimes”) and sentenced to medidas de seguridad predelictivas (“security measures”), even though no evidence was presented against them in court.

“The use of this particular legislation, which allows the government to jail its citizens on the slightest evidence because it believes they may commit a crime in the future, is a flagrant violation of international standards and must be immediately repealed,” said Javier Zúñiga.

“This Orwellian law is being used as a pretext to jail government critics,” he added.

Amnesty International believes the conviction is politically motivated, as both men are members of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (Unión Patriótica de Cuba, UNPACU), a civil society organization which advocates for greater civil liberties on the island.

Alexeis Vargas Martín and his 17-year-old twin brothers, Diango and Vianco Vargas Martín – all members of UNPACU – have been accused by the police of using violence or intimidation against a state official (atentado). They have not been formally charged and their lawyer has not been granted access to their case-files. They are being held at different prisons in Santiago de Cuba province.

“Repression of independent journalists, opposition leaders and human rights activists increased last year in Cuba, and show no sign of abating,” Javier Zúñiga added.

“In recent months, we have received scores of reports of people who were arbitrarily arrested and even imprisoned on ludicrous charges that violate international standards.”

By the end of June this year, 2,143 people are reported to have been subject to short-term arrests in Cuba.

There were reports of an average of 400 short-term arrests each month during 2012 and activists travelling from the provinces to Havana were frequently detained. The independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported 6,602 detentions of government critics last year, compared to 4,123 in 2011 and 2,074 in 2010.

Background

Cuban investigative journalist Calixto Martínez was freed on 9 April 2013 after Amnesty International named him a prisoner of conscience in January. He was held for almost seven months in prison but was never formally charged with any crime.

Emilio Planas Robert and Rafael Matos Montes de Oca were arrested in the eastern city of Guantánamo on 23 and 27 September last year respectively, after posters with anti-government slogans appeared around the city.

Alexeis Vargas Martín was arrested on 27 November 2012 in the city of Santiago de Cuba, as he tried to return to his home. His mother who is a member of the opposition organization Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) was throwing a birthday celebration. Pro-government protestors were demonstrating outside the house and had blocked the road.

His brothers, Diango and Vianco Vargas Martín, were arrested on 2 December, as they protested their brother's detention in front of a police station.