



Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Cuba

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Head of state and government: **Raúl Castro Ruz**

Repression of independent journalists, opposition leaders and human rights activists increased. There were reports of an average of 400 short-term arrests each month and activists travelling from the provinces to Havana were frequently detained. Prisoners of conscience continued to be sentenced on trumped-up charges or held in pre-trial detention.

Rights to freedom of expression, association, movement and assembly

Peaceful demonstrators, independent journalists and human rights activists were routinely detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Many were detained and others were subjected to acts of repudiation by government supporters.

- In March, local human rights activists faced a wave of arrests and local organizations reported 1,137 arbitrary detentions before and after the visit of Pope Benedict XVI.

The authorities adopted a range of measures to prevent activists reporting on human rights including surrounding the homes of activists and disconnecting phones. Organizations whose activities had been tolerated by the authorities in the past, such as the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, were targeted. Independent journalists reporting on dissidents' activities were detained.

The government continued to exert control over all media, while access to information on the internet remained challenging due to technical limitations and restrictions on content.

- In July, Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, one of Cuba's most respected human rights and pro-democracy campaigners, died in a car accident in Granma Province. Several journalists and bloggers covering the hearing into the accident were detained for several hours.

- Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, founder of the independent news agency Let's Talk Press (Hablemos Press), was forced into a car in September, and reportedly beaten as he was driven to a police station. Before being released, he was told that he had become the "number one dissident journalist" and would be imprisoned if he continued his activities.

A number of measures were used to stop or penalize activities by political opponents. Many attempting to attend meetings or demonstrations were detained or prevented from leaving their homes. Political opponents, independent journalists and human rights activists were routinely denied visas to travel abroad.

- For the 19th time since May 2008, Yoani Sánchez, an opposition blogger, was denied an exit visa. She had planned to attend the screening in Brazil of a documentary on blogging and censorship in which she featured.
- In September, around 50 members of the Ladies in White organization were detained on their way to Havana to attend a public demonstration. Most were immediately sent back to their home provinces and then released; 19 were held incommunicado for several days.

In October, the government announced changes to the Migration Law that facilitate travel abroad, including the removal of mandatory exit visas. However, a series of requirements – over which the government would exercise discretion – could continue to restrict freedom to leave the country. The amendments were due to become effective in January 2013.

Prisoners of conscience

Seven new prisoners of conscience were adopted by Amnesty International during the year; three were released without charge.

- Antonio Michel Lima Cruz was released in October after completing his two-year sentence. He had been convicted of "insulting symbols of the homeland" and "public disorder" for singing anti-government songs. His brother, Marcos Máiquel, who received a longer sentence for the same offences, remained in prison at the end of the year.
- Ivonne Malleza Galano and Ignacio Martínez Montejo were released in January, along with Isabel Haydee Álvarez, who was detained after calling for their release. They were held for 52 days without charge after taking part in a demonstration in November 2011. On their release, officials threatened them with "harsh sentences" if they continued dissident activities.
- Yasmín Conyedo Riverón, a journalist and representative of Ladies in White in Santa Clara province, and her husband, Yusmani Rafael Álvarez Esmori, were released on bail in April after nearly three months in prison. They faced charges of using violence or intimidation against a state official, who later withdrew the accusation.

Arbitrary detention

Short-term arbitrary detention continued and reports of short-term incommunicado detentions were frequent.

- In February, former prisoner of conscience José Daniel Ferrer García was detained and held incommunicado for three days. While detained, he was threatened with imprisonment if he continued dissident activities through the Patriotic Union of Cuba. In April, he was detained again on charges of "public disorder" and released 27 days later on condition that he give up political activism.

- Ladies in White Niurka Luque Álvarez and Sonia Garro Alfonso, and Sonia's husband Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González, were detained without charge in March. Niurka Luque Álvarez was released in October. Sonia Garro Alfonso and her husband remained in detention at the end of the year, but had not been formally charged.
- Andrés Carrión Álvarez was arrested for shouting "freedom" and "down with communism" at a mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI. He was released after 16 days in prison. He was detained for five hours three days later and charged with another count of "public disorder". He was released on condition that he report to the police once a week, and that he did not leave his home municipality without prior authorization or associate with government critics.

The US embargo against Cuba

In September, the USA renewed the Trading with the Enemy Act, which imposes financial and economic sanctions on Cuba and prohibits US citizens from travelling to and engaging in economic activities with the island. In November, the UN General Assembly adopted, for the 21st consecutive year, a resolution calling on the USA to lift the unilateral embargo.

The WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA and other UN agencies reported on the negative impact of the embargo on the health and wellbeing of Cubans and in particular on marginalized groups. In 2012, Cuba's health care authority and UN agencies did not have access to medical equipment, medicines and laboratory materials produced under US patents.

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