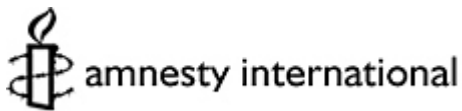


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Cuba

REPUBLIC OF CUBA

Head of state and government: Raúl Castro Ruz

Death penalty: retentionist

Population: 11.2 million

Life expectancy: 78.5 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 9/6 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 99.8 per cent

Civil and political rights continued to be severely restricted by the authorities. Government critics continued to be imprisoned; many reported that they were beaten during arrest. Restrictions on freedom of expression were commonplace. The government continued to curtail freedom of association and assembly. The US embargo against Cuba remained operational, despite increasing opposition to it within and outside the USA.

Background

Relations between Cuba and the USA improved during the year. Both governments initiated dialogues relating to migration issues and the re-establishment of a direct postal service between the two countries. Representatives of the US Congress visited Cuba in April and met the Cuban President.

The Council of Ministers underwent a major reshuffle in March and key ministers during Fidel Castro's last years in power were replaced.

In June, Cuba's 47-year suspension from the Organization of American States (OAS) was lifted. However, Cuba's participation in the OAS is conditional on its adherence to OAS principles.

In February, Cuba's human rights record was assessed under the UN Universal Periodic Review. Cuba adopted some broad undertakings but rejected most of the recommendations relating to the protection and promotion of civil and political rights. Cuba was re-elected to the Human Rights Council for another three-year term in May. The visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, planned for October, was postponed by the Cuban authorities until 2010.

Prisoners of conscience

At the end of the year, 55 prisoners of conscience continued to be detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. Prisoner of conscience Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, was released during 2009 on health grounds and Reinaldo Miguel Labrada Peña completed his sentence.

- Human rights defenders Darsi Ferrer and his wife, Yusnaimy Jorge, were arrested on 9 July at their home in Havana City and charged with possessing or receiving illegally obtained merchandise (*receptación*). They were due to lead the "Stroll of Your Dreams" march along the Malecón, Havana's sea front, later that day. Darsi Ferrer, a physician and President of the Juan Bruno Zayas Independent Health and Human Rights Centre, which supports marginalized members of Cuban society in Havana City, was beaten by seven police officers at the Aguilera Police Station in Lawton. The couple were conditionally released shortly after midnight the same day. On 21 July, Darsi Ferrer was re-arrested and charged with "contempt of the authorities". He was refused bail and taken to Valle Grande Prison in Havana Province, a maximum security prison for convicted criminals. He remained detained awaiting trial at the end of the year.

Freedom of expression, assembly and association

Freedom of expression continued to be severely restricted. All mass media and the internet remained under state control. The authorities continued to block access to the websites of bloggers and journalists critical of the government. Criminal charges such as "dangerousness" continued to be used to restrict dissidents from exercising freedom of expression, association and assembly. Independent journalists and bloggers faced harassment. Some were threatened with criminal prosecution and a number were detained.

- In September, Yosvani Anzardo Hernández, editor of the digital magazine *Candonga* and a correspondent for a Miami-based news website, was arrested by police officers at his home in Holguín Province. At the time of his arrest, the computer server hosting his digital magazine was confiscated. He was held at Pedernales Prison in Holguín Province during which time he was threatened with criminal prosecution under Law No. 88 on the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. He was released without charge after two weeks.

Freedom of movement

Restrictions on freedom of movement prevented journalists and human rights and political activists from carrying out legitimate and peaceful activities.

- In September, Yoani Sánchez, author of the popular blog *Generación Y*, was denied an exit visa by the Cuban authorities. She had been due to travel to the USA to receive the Maria Moors Cabot prize for journalism at Columbia University. She was also denied an exit visa to travel to Brazil following an invitation from the Brazilian Senate to present her book at a conference and address the legislature. In November, Yoani Sánchez and blogger Orlando Luis Pardo were forced into a car by state security agents and beaten and threatened before being released. The attackers told Yoani Sánchez "this is the end of it".

The US embargo against Cuba

The US embargo against Cuba continued to have a detrimental impact on the economic and social rights of Cubans. US legislation restricting exports of US-manufactured or patented supplies and equipment to Cuba continued to hinder access to medicine and medical technologies. UN agencies operating in Cuba were also affected by the embargo.

In April, US President Barack Obama eased travel restrictions, allowing individuals to visit relatives in Cuba and send them remittances. However, in September, he extended for another year his authority to apply financial sanctions against Cuba under the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917. For the 18th consecutive year, a resolution calling on the USA to end its embargo against Cuba was adopted by an overwhelming majority at the UN General Assembly. A bipartisan group of US senators introduced a bill that would allow all US citizens to travel freely to Cuba for the first time since 1962. Other bills were introduced to Congress aimed at easing or totally lifting the embargo. At the end of the year, these bills remained pending.

Death penalty

There were no executions. Three people remained on death row at the end of 2009; most death sentences had been commuted by President Raúl Castro in 2008.

- Otto René Rodríguez Llerena and Raúl Ernesto Cruz León, both Salvadoran nationals, remained under sentence of death. They had been convicted of terrorism charges in 1999. Their appeals against the sentences were pending before the People's Supreme Court at the end of the year.

Amnesty International visits/reports

- Amnesty International has not been allowed to visit Cuba since 1990.
- Cuba: Fear for safety – Jorge Luis García Pérez; Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera; Carlos Michael Morales Rodríguez; Diosiris Santana Pérez; Ernesto Mederos Arrozarena (AMR 25/003/2009)
- Cuba: Harassment – Edgard López Moreno (AMR 25/005/2009)
- The US embargo against Cuba – Its impact on economic and social rights (AMR 25/007/2009)

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