

March 1990

CUBA: JAILING THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

August 1989 - March 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION1

CONTINUING CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS2

Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation;
Cuban Human Rights Party; Martí Committee for Human Rights;
Cuban Committee for Human Rights2

Life Naturist Association and Sendero Verde4

Cuban Pro Amnesty Group5

José Martí Association of Independent Defenders of
Human Rights and Reconciliation5

Update: Association for Free Art5

Rights monitors sentenced to additional terms while in prison6

REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS7

Arrests of UJC dissidents8

OTHER PERSISTENT ABUSES8

Reprisals against asylum seekers8

Recent attacks on the press9

U.S. POLICY9

INTRODUCTION

When the United Nations Commission on Human Rights sent a delegation to Cuba to conduct an investigation in September 1988, the human rights movement in Cuba was flourishing as it never had before, and no human rights monitors were in prison.* Today, at least 20 monitors -- including the leaders of most of Cuba's small independent human rights organizations -- are in prison serving sentences of up to two years for their peaceful monitoring activities.

As the U.N. Commission convenes for its current session, the Cuban government has once again demonstrated its contempt for human rights monitoring by its own citizens, in marked contrast with the increased

* One activist, however, was being held against his will and without charge in the judicial ward of a psychiatric hospital in Santiago de Cuba. Jesús Leyva Guerra, who had been confined in Gustavo Machin hospital since July 14, 1988, was released from psychiatric detention on April 20, 1989, and was permitted to emigrate to the U.S. several months later.

485 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017
(212) 972-8400 FAX: (212) 972-0905

1522 K Street, NW, Suite 910, Washington DC 20005
(202) 371-6592 FAX: (202) 371-0124

tolerance for freedom of expression, association, and assembly which preceded the U.N. visit in September 1988. Fidel Castro's regime, now in its fourth decade in power, has clearly made a political decision to punish any form of dissent. By imprisoning those who attempt to hold their government accountable for violating basic civil and political rights, the Cuban government has tried to obscure its poor record and defend its practices as a strictly internal matter.*

The possibility of condemnation by the U.N. in 1987 and 1988 unquestionably yielded some positive results. The Cuban government opened its prisons to inspections by international organizations, it released a few hundred political prisoners, and tolerated independent activity by its own citizens. The 1989 U.N. vote ending significant scrutiny has produced a reversion to Cuba's prior abusive and intolerant ways.

Cuba's human rights practices are sharply at odds with international standards. Cuban laws that curtail basic rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- freedom of expression, association, assembly and movement, and the rights of privacy and due process -- remain in force. There are no legal institutions independent of the government and the governing Communist Party that could ensure respect for such rights. There are no free press, no opposition political parties, no independent judiciary, no independent labor unions, and no legally recognized human rights organizations. All Cubans are affected by the absence of such institutions. Cuban prisons continue to hold several hundred political prisoners serving sentences for crimes such as attempting to leave the country illegally (although legal emigration is often delayed or denied on political grounds) or attempting to stage a demonstration. Many recently-arrested activists have been held for months without trial and several have been re-sentenced, for apparently political reasons, while in prison. In the last six months, the Cuban government has banned two Soviet publications, expelled a Czech journalist, and arrested dissidents from the Union of Communist Youths.

This newsletter is a follow-up to our January 1989 report "Human Rights in Cuba: The Need to Sustain the Pressure," and our July 1989 newsletter "Human Rights Activists Behind Bars in Cuba." The facts outlined below highlight the need for continuing U.N. pressure as the most effective means of curbing Cuban human rights violations. Americas Watch urges the United Nations Commission on Human Rights not to forget those human rights monitors and independent activists who were emboldened by the increased international attention they received in 1988 and who are now languishing in jail.

CONTINUING CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation

Cuban Human Rights Party

Martí Committee for Human Rights

Cuban Committee for Human Rights

The leaders of three of Cuba's independent human rights groups -- Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), Hiram Abi Cobas Núñez of the Cuban Human Rights Party (PPDHC) and Hubert Jerez Mariño of the Martí Committee for Human Rights (CMDH) -- were arrested by state security police on August 6, 1989, in an ongoing campaign against the human rights community in Cuba.

Searches of the homes of the three activists began shortly after 5:00 a.m. Approximately twenty state-security officers searched the Sánchez home for four hours and confiscated, among other things, documents published by the United Nations, Amnesty International and Americas Watch; a photograph of Sánchez with U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy; two typewriters and a tape recorder. The area of the Sánchez home used by CCDHRN as an office was sealed. The state-security officers, headed by Major Tomás Martínez Rodríguez, reportedly had a search warrant. Relatives of Cobas and Jerez are said to have reported that similar searches were conducted in their homes.

* The Cuban Government's current attitude towards human rights investigations was demonstrated recently in its response to a request by Americas Watch to attend the trial of three of Cuba's human rights leaders in November 1989. José Arbesú, Chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, stated that his government considered the presence of Americas Watch in Cuba to be "unnecessary." He added that the defendants enjoyed all procedural guarantees afforded by the Cuban judicial system and that their trial was a "strictly internal matter." At a conference on Cuba that took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia in November 1989, Miguel Alfonso, formerly a representative of Cuba at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, reflected the same attitude when he asked, as a member of the panel on human rights, who "anointed" Americas Watch to inspect Cuban prisons. The United Nations' failure to sustain its earlier pressure has substantially aided the Cuban government in this effort.

The three activists were taken to Villa Marista, the state-security headquarters in Havana, where they were held for almost six weeks. They received weekly visits from family members who reported that although the detainees were not being physically mistreated, they were being held in windowless isolation cells with the lights on 24 hours a day; they were not permitted sun or exercise; and they were denied reading and writing materials. These conditions of confinement tend to have a disorienting effect on detainees. On September 13, the three were transferred to Combinado del Este prison in Havana.

Sánchez was permitted a brief visit with his father shortly before the father's death on September 2, and he was also permitted to attend the wake.

Sánchez, Cobas, and Jerez were accused of "disseminating false news against international peace" under Article 115 of the Cuban Penal Code, in connection with their reporting on the July 1989 trial and executions of Generals Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez, Antonio de la Guardia, and others. This provision of the criminal code authorizes imprisonment for one to four years for "disseminating false news with the purpose of disturbing international peace, or placing in danger the prestige of the Cuban State or its good relations with another State." It is classified in the Penal Code as a crime against state security.

It appears that because these detainees are well known, the authorities took the unusual step for such cases of permitting them access to lawyers in pre-trial detention. This had not occurred for any of the other activists arrested since September 1988. Two of the lawyers selected by the defendants are independent -- that is, they do not belong to the official law collectives, and as a result are not currently practicing -- and are active in the human rights community. They were given access to the investigation records. While Americas Watch welcomes these steps toward respect for the procedural rights of these criminal defendants, we consider the charge and detention to be an improper infringement of free speech at a time when Cuba is not at war or under a state of emergency.

Sánchez, Cobas and Jerez were tried in the Havana Provincial Court's special section for crimes against state security on November 17 and sentenced on November 24 to prison terms of two years in the case of Sánchez, and 18 months in the cases of Cobas and Jerez.

While in Combinado del Este, Sánchez and Jerez were held in an isolation section of the prison known by inmates as "*los candados*" (the padlocks). Sánchez spent some time in the prison hospital for attention to his gastro-intestinal condition. Sánchez and Jerez were subjected to psychiatric evaluations in the Havana Psychiatric Hospital on October 24 and 25. They were returned to Combinado del Este on October 26.

Cobas, who suffers from heart ailments, has spent much of his time in detention in the Carlos J. Finlay military hospital in Havana, where he was interned shortly after the three were transferred to Combinado del Este prison. Later he was moved to the Combinado del Este hospital. He reportedly looked very ill at his trial. His family fears that his health continues to deteriorate.

On December 22, Sánchez and Jerez were transferred to Aguica prison in Matanzas province, 200 kilometers from their homes in Havana. About one week later, Jerez was transferred from Aguica to Kilo-7 prison in Camaguey province, 500 kilometers from Havana. Cobas remained in Combinado del Este.

Sánchez was initially held in the "*La Polaca*" section of Aguica prison, which holds 17 isolation cells. His cell measured approximately 3 x 4 meters, with a hole in the floor for a toilet and a tube several inches from the hole which provided water a few times a day. He was not permitted to have a container to hold drinking water. The ceiling in his cell had an opening that measured approximately one square meter and was covered by bars. During the day, sunlight and fresh air enter the cell, but there was concern that conditions would become unpleasant when it rained. There was no electricity in the cell, so that after sundown it became very dark. Sánchez was permitted three books at a time, but no writing materials. His meals were brought to him three times a day. He was not allowed out of his cell for exercise and had no contact with other prisoners. After approximately seven weeks in this cell, he was reportedly moved to the prison infirmary.

In Kilo-7, Jerez was held in a punishment cell during the last three weeks of February 1990, reportedly for collecting information on prison conditions and writing poems and short stories. Jerez's bed was reportedly removed from the punishment cell in the morning and replaced in the evening, leaving a bench to sit on during the day; there was no light and he was permitted no reading materials; and he received only a half ration of food. Jerez was allowed to attend the funeral of his mother, who died on February 24.

In addition to Sánchez, Cobas, and Jerez, several other members of their groups have been arrested in recent

months. Cuban police (*Policía Nacional Revolucionaria*) arrested **Edita Cruz Rodríguez**, a member of PPDHC, on November 11 following a search of her home. Her arrest is believed to be in connection with a gathering planned by human rights activists for a Sunday mass at the Cathedral of Havana on November 12. About two hundred activists and sympathizers reportedly attended the mass in an expression of concern for a long-term prisoner, Alfredo Mustelier Nuevo, who was on hunger strike in Combinado del Este prison.

After being held initially in a police station near Zapata and C Streets in Havana, Cruz was later transferred to the Havana women's prison (*Centro de Reeducción de Mujeres del Occidente*) where she served a three-month sentence imposed earlier in the year. Cruz had been arrested on April 4, 1989 for her attempt to participate in an illegal demonstration by human rights activists during Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Havana. She was tried and sentenced to three months in prison, but the sentence was suspended because of medical problems. Cruz was released upon completion of her sentence on February 8, 1990.

Americas Watch received reports that at least three members of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights, **Rodolfo González González**, **Roberto Regalado** and **Angela Rey Miranda**, were verbally harassed and threatened by state security police who went to their homes on November 11 to warn them to stay away from the mass at the Cathedral of Havana the next day.

Yndamiro Restano, a leader of CCDHRN and the Association of Independent Journalists of Cuba, was summoned to the Villa Marista state-security facility on November 15 and questioned for several hours about his human rights work.

State security police arrested **Juan José Moreno Reyes**, a CCDHRN member in Holguín province, following a search of his home in Moa on November 16. A number of CCDHRN documents were confiscated from him. Moreno was held in the state-security facility in Holguín and released without charge on November 21. He was warned against continuing his human rights activities.

Domingo Hernández Cepero, a leader of the PPDHC, and **Danilo Valdez**, another leading member of the group, were arrested on the street by state security police on January 27, 1990. Earlier in the day, state security police had searched their homes. Hernández, a 65-year-old retired employee of the Ministry of Education, and Valdez, an auto mechanic, were held in Villa Marista and released without charge after five days in detention.

On March 5, 1990, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution organized a mob to hold an "act of repudiation," (*acto de repudio*) against human rights monitors in Havana. Several hundred government supporters, including workers, housewives, teachers and school children were "mobilized" for the event and reportedly were transported in trucks to the home of a CCPDH leader, **Sebastian Arcos Bergnes**. The mob broke down the door of the house without entering, hurled insults and shouted revolutionary slogans from about 10:00 a.m. to about 8:00 p.m.. Trapped inside were Sebastian Arcos, his brother **Gustavo Arcos Bergnes** and **Oscar Peña**, leaders of the CCPDH; **Samuel Martínez Lara** (see below) of the PPDHC; and **Domingo Hernández Cepero** and **Yndamiro Restano** (see above).

Life Naturist Association and the *Sendero Verde*

On August 21, Cuban police closed down the headquarters of the vegetarian society, Life Naturist Association, located on a farm outside the city of Havana. The farmhouse, which is also the home of the group's leaders, **Orlando Polo** and his wife **Mercedes Paez**, has been sealed. Polo and Paez were reportedly detained for a short time the same day. The *Asociación Naturista Vida*, or "Life Naturist Association," which is said to have been originally founded in 1935 by Spanish anarchists, was operating as a legal, officially recognized organization of about 150 members. However, it fell into disfavor, probably because Polo and Paez are also active in environmental and peace issues. In April 1988, the Supreme Court ordered the organization dissolved, reportedly because the group was overstepping its mandate, but also because the government was interested in the farmland it occupied. No action was taken until August 1989.

Polo and Paez are also leaders of the independent "eco-pacifist movement," *Sendero Verde*, an anti-war and anti-nuclear group which, among other things, opposes Cuban involvement in Angola. Since 1985, Polo, sometimes with Paez, has made numerous walks from nearly one end of the island to the other, stopping in public places to speak to assembled crowds. Polo has been detained almost two dozen times during these walks.

Through their colleagues in the human rights community, Polo and Paez informed the international press and

human rights community abroad of the closing of the farm. They also staged a hunger strike. On August 23, state security police arrested Polo. The police held him for one week in Villa Marista, releasing him without charge on August 29.

State security police again arrested Polo on September 22, holding him in Villa Marista until October 13 when he was again released without charge. Polo was reportedly summoned to Villa Marista for questioning in mid-November.

Cuban Pro Amnesty Group

Six state security officers searched the home of **Esteban González González**, head of the newly formed Cuban Pro Amnesty Group, between 10:00 p.m. September 23 and 3:00 a.m. September 24. González, a 59-year-old math teacher at the Conrado Benítez workers' night school, was detained and taken to Villa Marista. During the house search, for which the state security police had a warrant, they confiscated human rights documents, among other things. González was held in Villa Marista for three months until December 22 when he was transferred to Combinado del Este prison. He is in his fifth month of detention without charge.

Three others believed to be members of this group were also arrested and taken to Villa Marista following searches of their homes on September 24. They are **Mario Fernández Mora**, **Arturo Montané**, and **Manuel Pozo Montero**. Another member, **Edgardo Llompart**, was reportedly summoned to Villa Marista on September 25 and was detained there. Soon thereafter, state security police arrested González's son-in-law, **Manuel Regueiro**, and **Isidro Ledesma**. Both are said to be members of the group. All six were also transferred to Combinado del Este prison on December 22, where they remain without charge.

Hector Fabian Moreno, who is not a member of the group, was swept up in the string of arrests. State security police searched his home and arrested him on September 24. He was reportedly released without charge after several weeks.

The Cuban Pro Amnesty Group has made efforts to become legally recognized by the Cuban government since May 1989, when it petitioned the Ministry of Justice. As recently as September 18, González went to the Ministry of Justice to seek a response to his inquiries, but received none. The group calls for a general amnesty for political prisoners and abolition of the death penalty. Several members of this group, including Esteban González, have also formed the Movement for Democratic Integration, a group that seeks to promote democracy and respect for human rights, and supports non-violent activism to establish independent civic and political institutions in Cuba.

José Martí Association of Independent Defenders of Human Rights and National Reconciliation

On October 8, police officers of the PNR arrested **Julio Soto Angurel**, head of the José Martí Association of Independent Defenders of Human Rights and National Reconciliation, in Havana. He was initially held in a local police station; then transferred to the Psychiatric Hospital of Havana; finally, he was transferred to Combinado del Este prison. He is believed to be in the isolation cell section of "los candados."

Soto was reportedly charged at the end of January with "contempt" and possession of explosives, and faces up to four years in prison.

Formed in 1987, the José Martí Association is a small group that advocates policies of reform such as the Soviet Union's *perestroika* and *glasnost*, which have been rejected by President Castro. Soto served in the Cuban armed forces in Angola. In the early 1970s he was reportedly expelled from the national film institute for a disparaging comment about the cost of living in Cuba.

Update: Association For Free Art

In October 1988, state security police detained five people believed to be affiliated with the Association for Free Art, a group founded in August 1988 that advocates freedom of expression and artistic creation. They were not charged until July 1989. They were held initially in Villa Marista, and then transferred to various prisons in February 1989. **Pablo Roberto Pupo Sánchez** and **Gilberto Plasencia Jiménez** were released on bond from Alamar prison in August 1989 pending trial. **Ramón Obregón Sarduy** and **Lázaro Cabrera Puentes** remained in Quivicán prison in Havana province. **Juan Enrique García** remained in Guanajay prison, also in Havana province.

The five were tried at the Provincial Court of Havana on September 15, 1989. They were permitted defense

attorneys. Four were convicted and sentenced for illicit association and failing to comply with "the duty to denounce" the others in the case. Pupo, Cabrera and García were each sentenced to 18 months in prison, and Obregón to nine months in prison. Plasencia was convicted on charges of illicit association and illegal possession of a weapon and sentenced to 15 months in prison. Pupo, Cabrera, and Plasencia were imprisoned in Combinado del Este prison; Obregón in Quivicán prison in Havana province; and García in Guanajay prison also in Havana province.

Association For Free Art (APAL) members **Carlos Novoa Ponce** and **Jorge Luis Mari Becerra** were also implicated in the same case. Novoa and Mari were arrested at their homes on January 27 and 28, 1989, after they distributed a document announcing their plan to form a Christian Democratic Party committee. They were initially held in Villa Marista, and in March were transferred to Quivicán prison in Havana province, where they were held with common prisoners. In early July, Novoa was transferred to the Guanajay prison hospital in Havana province to recover from a two-month hunger strike he staged to protest their detention without charge. Mari was reportedly held for a time in a punishment cell in Quivicán prison, apparently because he, too, participated in a hunger strike.

In July, they were charged with illicit association and failing to comply with the "duty to denounce" the others in the case. Novoa was reportedly released on bond in August; Mari was released on bond two days before the September 15 trial. The Provincial Court of Havana sentenced Novoa to 15 months in prison, and he is believed to be serving his term in Guanajay prison. Mari received a 21-month prison term and is believed to be held in Quivicán. Previously, Novoa had been briefly detained in September 1988 for his attempt to meet with the visiting delegation of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Plasencia, Cabrera and Pupo were reportedly released in early February -- Plasencia on completion of his sentence, and Cabrera and Pupo on having their conviction on charges of failing to comply with the "duty to denounce" overturned on appeal.

Rights monitors sentenced to additional terms while in prison

Americas Watch is alarmed by the Cuban government's practice of sentencing human rights activists to additional terms while they serve time in prison. This practice was believed to have largely ceased in recent years. However, there are indications that a pattern of prolonged confinement may be re-emerging.

Roberto Bahamonde Massot, a member of both the Human Rights Party and CCDHRN who, while he served three months in prison for attempting to participate in an illegal demonstration during Mikhail Gorbachev's April visit, received a sentence of an additional year in prison for his "illicit economic activities." An agronomist, Bahamonde had no prospects for a government job in his field since the mid-1970s when he was detained twice for writing a letter to Fidel Castro recommending reforms in the government's economic and agricultural policies. He had been making a living, without government permission, as a photographer since the early 1980s. Americas Watch believes the Cuban authorities have applied this law selectively against Bahamonde because of his independent activities. (See also Americas Watch's "Human Rights Activists Behind Bars in Cuba," July 1989, p.3-4) Bahamonde is currently serving his additional one-year sentence in Combinado del Sur prison in Matanzas province.

David Moya, a member of the Human Rights Party who served nine months in prison for attempting to participate in an illegal demonstration during Mikhail Gorbachev's April visit, was re-sentenced to an additional prison term on charges of "contempt," reportedly in October 1989, six months into his first sentence. The reasons for this charge are unclear. Moya is currently serving his second sentence of 18 months in Cinco-y-medio prison in Pinar del Río province.

At the end of December, prison authorities told **Samuel Martínez Lara**, the leader of the Human Rights Party at the time of his arrest, who served nine months in prison for attempting to participate in an illegal demonstration during Mikhail Gorbachev's April visit, that he would not be released at the end of his sentence. He was accused of "contempt" of President Castro and making offensive comments with regard to Panama. Two common prisoners were reportedly encouraged to attack him and he is said to be faulted also for the scuffle that ensued. Martínez was finally released from Aguica prison on February 22, 1990, one month late, reportedly with the "contempt" charge still pending.

Americas Watch received reports late in 1989 that **Vladimir García Alderete**, a member of the Association for Free Art who served a nine-month prison term on charges of "public disorder" for commemorating Cuban Culture Day on October 20, 1988 [see "Human Rights in Cuba" January 1989 Americas Watch report, p. 37-38], was reportedly sentenced to an additional three months in prison on charges of "contempt" (*desacato*). He was released from his

second sentence in early November 1989.

Americas Watch is also concerned about the periods of prolonged detention without trial to which a number of human rights activists have been subjected. Apart from the seven members of the Association for Free Art who were confined in prisons for up to nine months before being charged and up to eleven months before being brought to trial, three other activists -- Enrique Acosta Ruiz, Lázaro Rosa Arbolay and Sergio de la Vega Gómez -- are currently in their tenth month of detention without charge in Combinado del Este prison.

REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS

There continue to be as many as several hundred other political prisoners in Cuba, many believed to be serving sentences for nonviolent offenses such as illegal attempts to leave the country, for refusing to perform obligatory military service, and for technically common crimes such as "contempt," "public disorder," or "clandestine printing."

Three long-term prisoners (*plantados*), Mario Chanes de Armas, Ernesto Díaz Rodríguez and José Mustelier Nuevo, remain in Combinado del Este prison. The *plantados* -- believed to number 400 to 500 as recently as 1979 -- were arrested during the early years of the Castro regime for armed and unarmed opposition to the new government. In many cases, it appeared that nonviolent opposition to the government, especially by disaffected former supporters of the revolution, was considered to be as serious a crime as armed insurrection. They were held for long periods without trial and then tried before military courts, known as Revolutionary Tribunals, without any semblance of due process. They were sentenced to prison terms generally ranging from twenty to thirty years.

Because they considered themselves political prisoners, the *plantados* resisted "reeducation" by prison authorities by refusing to wear the common prisoners' uniforms; refusing to work; and maintaining a politically antagonistic attitude toward their jailers. Consequently, the *plantados* were denied benefits afforded others such as more food, visits, exercise, and better living conditions. Instead, they spent their prison terms wearing underwear, pajamas, or nothing at all. They engaged in hunger strikes and other forms of nonviolent protest. And they were punished for their defiant behavior: visits, correspondence, books, and access to outdoors were suspended; their belongings were confiscated during countless and often violent "inspections" (*requisas*); they were moved to tiny, dark punishment cells, and held in isolation.

Mario Chanes de Armas has served 29 years of a 30-year sentence in prison. Ernesto Díaz Rodríguez has served 21 years of a 40-year sentence. And José Mustelier Nuevo has served 20 years of a 25-year prison term. To mark the end of his twentieth year in prison, Mustelier staged a hunger strike on October 27, 1989, and renounced liquids three days later. Americas Watch received reports that he was transferred to a punishment cell for several days for engaging in the hunger strike. In dangerously frail health in mid-November, Mustelier was transferred to the Carlos J. Finlay hospital and began to be force-fed intravenously. After considerable international attention was brought to Mustelier's condition, Cuban authorities are said to be reviewing his case.

Alberto Grau Sierra, a *plantado* who was arrested on September 5, 1964, completed his 25-year sentence and was released on September 4, 1989.

Americas Watch received reports in February 1989 that as many as eighty prisoners in Combinado del Este prison convicted or awaiting trial on charges of attempting to leave the country illegally had staged a hunger strike beginning January 19, 1989. The *lancheros* (from the word *lancha* meaning small boat) were being held with common prisoners and attempted to assert their claim to be considered political prisoners, to demand better treatment and attention to their cases. Most Cubans are not free to leave their country, or to leave and return without a certain amount of harassment. Because applying for permission to emigrate is seen as a gesture of discontent with the revolution, many are inhibited by the prospect of extra-legal retaliation. Many who do apply to emigrate are often arbitrarily denied permission. For these reasons, several hundred Cubans are believed to attempt to leave the country illegally every year.

Their hunger strike was reportedly violently suppressed on January 26, when prison guards beat a number of them. Twelve were reportedly wounded, four of them seriously, and twelve or more were reportedly moved to punishment cells in Detachment 47, a separate prison building known as "the rectangle of death" by the prisoners, and to isolation cells in the regular prison buildings. A number of *lancheros* were still believed to be on hunger strike at the end of February. Some of them continued to be held in the punishment and isolation cells in early March. (For more

on restrictions on freedom of movement and for a description of punishment cells, see Americas Watch's January 1989 report, "Human Rights in Cuba.")

Arrests of UJC dissidents

State security police arrested **Jorge Quintana** and **Carlos Ortega**, members of the Union of Communist Youths (UJC), the youth organization of the Communist Party, and took them to Villa Marista on January 4, 1990. Two other UJC members, whose names are not known, were also said to have been arrested. Quintana, Ortega, and the other two were mathematics students at the University of Havana. They are believed to have been arrested in connection with a series of appeals they made to the leadership of the UJC for greater openness in discussing Cuban government and society. The arrest also appears to be connected with a letter from Quintana to the UJC leadership which declared that "the levels of democracy do not correspond with the development achieved by our society"; referred to the "personality cult in the person of Fidel"; and stated "Fidel is a traitor.... What you call a revolution is really Stalinism." Before their arrest, Quintana and Ortega were reportedly expelled from both the UJC and the university.

The students are not known to have had a history of conflict with the authorities and are said to have voiced their dissent solely within the ranks of the UJC. The fact that they were members of the UJC indicates that they were students with exemplary ideological and academic standing. These are the first arrests of UJC members that have been brought to the attention of Americas Watch. Quintana and Ortega are currently reported to be held without charge. The other two are believed to have been released.

OTHER PERSISTENT ABUSES

Reprisals against asylum seekers

Cuban authorities continue to take reprisals against family members of Cubans who have sought asylum outside Cuba. The reprisals are in the form of repeated denials of permission for family members to emigrate, or extra-legal harassment by Cuban authorities.

José Alberto Menéndez Suárez, a former trainer for the Cuban national cycling team, who sought asylum in the U.S. Embassy in Panama in December 1987, has been seeking since then to be reunited with his 14-year-old son, Alexander. Alexander has not only been repeatedly denied permission to emigrate but also has been subjected to reprisals. His wife, who was herself subjected to a certain amount of harassment, was permitted to leave Cuba and emigrated to the U.S. to join Menéndez in September 1988. Alexander has a visa to enter the U.S.

In mid-December 1989, Alexander and his 68-year-old grandmother reportedly went to the U.S. Interests Section, apparently on the advice of a Cuban immigration official, and were detained by the Cuban guards outside. They were reportedly taken to the Villa Marista state security facility and held there for several hours. Alexander was threatened with being sent to reform school.

A few weeks later, Major Armando Guirola of INDER, the national sports institute, reportedly went to Alexander's home in Matanzas to get him to sign a document that said that he would no longer seek to leave the country. Although he was threatened with being expelled from the *pioneros* -- a mass organization for school children* -- and, again, with being sent to reform school, Alexander refused to sign. Alexander was then expelled from the *pioneros*.

About one week later, in early January 1990, Ministry of Interior officers went to Alexander's home to tell him he had to present himself at a reform school for juvenile offenders in Jague Grande in Matanzas. Alexander complied and was there for about one week before his grandmother brought him back home. He is now at home but has stayed away from school for fear of further harassment and reprisals there.

Roger Vásquez is also a former trainer for the Cuban national cycling team who sought asylum in Mexico in May 1988 and now lives in the U.S. His wife, **Rosa Miranda Díaz**, and 13-year-old daughter, **Lisette Vásquez**

* According to The Historical Dictionary of Cuba, the Organización de Pioneros José Martí is "led, tutored and controlled by Communist cadres who instill in children 'a sense of honor, modesty, courage, comradeship, love of both physical and intellectual work, respect for workers, and love for our Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior.'" See Jaime Suchlicki, ed., The Historical Dictionary of Cuba. Scarecrow Press Inc., 1988.

Miranda, have been repeatedly denied permission to leave the country. According to our information, Lissette was also expelled from the *pioneros* and has not returned to school for fear of reprisals.

Juana Hilda García Delmonte, the wife of Dr. Guillermo Delmonte, a physician who obtained asylum in Canada in 1980, and their two daughters, **Ana Victoria** and **Hilda Eneida**, have waited nine years for permission to leave Cuba to emigrate to Canada.

Recent attacks on the press

The Cuban government banned two Soviet publications, Moscow News and Sputnik, in August. The periodicals, published in Spanish for Cuban consumption, had provided a significant source of information on current events in the Soviet Union. The official explanation for the ban was published in the Communist Party newspaper, Granma, which accused the journals of "justifying bourgeois democracy as the highest form of popular participation and with a fascination for the American way of life"; and stated that by reading them "those who are not firmly convinced of the historical necessity and possibilities of socialism could doubt its viability and even lose hope."

A Czechoslovak radio correspondent was expelled by Cuban authorities on January 11, 1990, for reporting in a "completely distorted and almost provocative manner." Michal Cermak was the Latin America correspondent based in Havana for the official Czechoslovak news agency, CTK. Cermak is said to have reported on shortages of food and described the political situation in Cuba as "a calm before a storm, but of the Romanian type."

U.S. POLICY

The pressure exerted by the United States government at the U.N. Commission in recent years has had the positive effect of bringing attention to the human rights abuses that persist in Cuba, and while Cuba was under the spotlight, some of those abuses subsided. However, this success has been undermined to a significant extent by the insupportable or exaggerated nature of Washington's past claims against Cuba.

In 1986-87, the State Department made the wholly insupportable allegation that the Cuban government was then engaging in systematic torture, political killings, and disappearances. When, in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1988, the State Department correctly reported that no such cases could be found, it created the misleading impression that Cuba's rights practices had improved drastically, when in fact, all that had changed was the accuracy of State Department reporting. Indeed, respect for human rights in Cuba had in fact deteriorated by the time the State Department's report was issued. The U.N. report based on its September 1988 trip to Cuba also failed to find overwhelming evidence that the Cuban government engaged in gross abuses such as political killings, disappearances, and systematic torture. In that light, the U.N. Commission decided in March 1989 to suspend its scrutiny of human rights conditions in Cuba, although at the time some twenty-two human rights activists were in prison serving terms up to one year or were being held in detention for months without charge.

Americas Watch is encouraged by the greatly improved quality of the State Department country reports on Cuba. The report covering 1988, and the current report covering 1989 released in February 1990, are on the whole balanced and reliable. They can be depended on by the U.N. as a grounds for censuring Cuba. Accurate reporting, not propaganda, will be the U.S.'s greatest asset in its campaign to call attention to human rights violations in Cuba.

For more information, contact Mary Jane Camejo or Susan Osnos at (212) 972-8400.

Americas Watch is a non-governmental organization that was created in 1981 to monitor human rights practices in Latin America and the Caribbean and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. Its Executive Director is Juan E. Méndez; Research Director, Anne Manuel; Counsel, Jemera Rone; Research Associate, Mary Jane Camejo.

Americas Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also comprises Africa Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch. The Chairman of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein; Vice-Chairman, Adrian DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director; Deputy Director, Kenneth Roth; Press Director, Susan Osnos; Washington Director, Holly Burkhalter; California Director, Ellen Lutz; and Orville Schell Human Rights Intern, James Goldston.