



PERSPECTIVE SERIES

CUBA: SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION OF DISSENT

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This report addresses country conditions through November 1997.

CUBA
Systematic Suppression of Dissent
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NOTE: This report has been written to address the information needs and issues of concern to U.S. Asylum Officers. To facilitate timely access, certain information may be repeated in several chapters of this report.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As described in chapters II-VII of this report, Cuba is a one-party Communist state, in which every Cuban is subject to a totalitarian system of political and social control. That system is institutionalized and given legal framework by the 1976 Constitution and the Penal Code, which together outlaw virtually any form of political or civic activity outside the purview of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Anyone deemed by the regime to be in opposition to it is regarded as a “counterrevolutionary” and an “enemy,” and is therefore at risk of punishment. The judicial system is constitutionally subordinated to the executive and legislative branches and under the control of the PCC. That leaves Cubans with no recourse before the unlimited powers of the state, which has “zero tolerance for the growth of civil society”¹ and systematically violates the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, privacy and due process of law.

The only mitigating factors are international opinion, and the leverage provided by the Cuban government’s need since the demise of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc to secure Western investment to keep Cuba’s ailing economy from collapsing. In the 1990s Cuban dissidents have sought to take advantage of the regime’s vulnerability in this regard. As described in Chapters IX, XI and XIV, and as can be seen in the lists of members of the *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Council, in Appendices I and III, dissident groups have proliferated in this decade despite repeated crackdowns against them. What began in the second half of the 1970s as a handful of human rights groups has grown into a diverse array which now includes independent journalists, youth and women’s organizations, trade unionists, former political prisoners, lawyers’ groups, medical associations, artists, environmentalists and farmers.

More than 130 dissident organizations affiliated themselves with the *Concilio Cubano*, which is described in Chapter XI, while others remained independent even though they may have shared its non-violent, democratic principles. More recently, many dissident groups have joined two new umbrella groups that have emerged in the wake of the 1996 crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano*: the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna*, Internal Dissidence Work Group, and the *Alianza Nacional Cubana*, Cuban National Alliance, both of which are described in Chapter XIV, and were targeted in the 1997 summer crackdown.

¹ Vivanco, José Miguel. “European Muscle Needed to Change Castro’s Policy,” *European Voice* (19-25 September 1996), p.14-15 - as reprinted in *Cuba Brief*, Freedom House (New York: January 1997), p. 12-13. José Miguel Vivanco is executive director of Human Rights Watch/America.

In response to international pressure, the Cuban government has occasionally made human rights gestures—for example, the freeing of political prisoners or a slight easing of repression. However, the laws that legalize and provide impunity for human rights violations and the suppression of peaceful dissent have never been altered, except to strengthen them. The only exception was the constitutional reform in 1991 which lessened some of the restrictions on religious expression, a tactical maneuver by the regime which is assessed in Chapter XVI, Section D.

The statement by prominent Cuban dissident and human rights monitor Elizardo Sanchez Santa Cruz during a slight thaw in spring 1995 has always held true: “Repression always had its ups and downs, and the current situation can change tomorrow because we have no guarantee of human rights here.”² Indeed, the U.S. Department of State reported the following year:

The government’s human rights record worsened in 1996 with the large-scale crackdown against the prodemocracy umbrella group “Concilio Cubano,” the shutdown of two U.S. civilian airplanes in international airspace, increased reports of deaths due to the excessive use of force by police, further restrictions on the distribution of foreign publications, increased use of exile and internal exile to control the activities of independent journalists and human rights advocates, antagonism to any foreign diplomatic criticism of human rights practices, restrictions on foreign contacts with human rights activists, the denial of visas to prominent U.S. journalists, and the expulsions of visiting foreign journalists.³

Also with regard to 1996, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba concluded in his most recent report, “To be a dissident in Cuba is as difficult today as it has been at any time in recent years.”⁴

Those readers who are looking for a reference to a specific group or organization should consult the Index and Appendices I and II. It should be emphasized, however, that if the group in question is not mentioned in this report, it does not mean that group does not or has not at some time existed. When searching for references to a particular group, it should be kept in mind that some parts of a group’s name may be dropped in common parlance or in media accounts. For example, the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la*

² Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 2.

³ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Washington, DC: February 1997), p. 413.

⁴ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 16.

Democracia, Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy, is often referred to simply as *Jóvenes por la Democracia*. Also, spellings of people's names are not necessarily rendered exactly, due in large part to the difficulties Cuban dissidents and independent journalists experience in transmitting information between themselves and with the world outside Cuba.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STATE

Cuba is a one-party Communist state. Communist structures were institutionalized under the Constitution approved after more than a decade of preparation by the first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) in December 1975. The Constitution was formally implemented in February 1976. At the fourth PCC congress in October 1991, the single-party state was reaffirmed and the Constitution was amended to reinforce Communist rule. Article 5 of the Constitution states:

The Communist Party of Cuba, based on Marxism-Leninism and the thought of José Martí, is the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation and the highest directing force of the society and the State, which organizes and orients the common efforts toward the high aims of building socialism and advancing toward the communist society.

José Martí was the hero of the fight for Cuban independence from Spain in the late 1800s, and his mantle is claimed, too, by many organizations that oppose the government, both in Cuba and abroad.

The Cuban Constitution provides for collegiate state and governmental organs modeled after those of the old Soviet Union as prescribed in the 1936 Soviet Constitution. But unlike the charters of the former Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies, the Cuban Constitution concentrates enormous power in a single individual—Fidel Castro.

The Constitution provides for a National Assembly of People's Power whose members emerge from an electoral process controlled by the PCC. Theoretically, the National Assembly designates a Council of State which appoints a Council of Ministers in consultation with its president who serves as head of state and chief of government. In reality, there is no separation of powers between the executive and the legislative body—Fidel Castro is responsible for virtually every appointment and the National Assembly meets for only a few days twice a year to ratify his decisions. In 1996 the National Assembly convened only once. Moreover, Article 91 of the Constitution grants Castro, as head of state and government, the unlimited authority to “assume leadership of any ministry or central agency of the administration.” Fidel Castro, as first secretary of the

PCC, president of the Council of Ministers, chairman of the Council of State, and commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), is a “hands-on caudillo”⁵ who controls every lever of power in Cuba.⁶

The 1991 PCC congress marked a new high in the personality cult of Fidel Castro, as it granted him even greater power within the PCC, the nation’s dominant institution. The congress dissolved the PCC Secretariat and its Central Committee departments, further centralizing policy-making authority in the PCC Political Bureau presided over by Castro, along with his younger brother, Raúl, who is PCC second secretary.⁷

At the fifth PCC congress held on October 8-10, 1997, the trend continued. The number of members of the Central Committee was reduced from 225 to 150, further enhancing Fidel Castro’s power. Eight people were removed from the Political Bureau and seven added, which dropped the membership to 24 from 25. Diplomats in Havana said that the authority of all the newcomers “derives directly from Fidel.” In his opening-day speech to the congress, the now 71-year-old Fidel Castro stated, “Anything but retreat, anything but surrender... This nation, this party will never surrender their unity.” He also formally endorsed his brother Raúl, 66, as his successor.⁸ In turn, Raúl Castro explained to the congress that the downsizing of the Central Committee was designed to make the body immune to “ideological viruses.” He added, “What happened to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is not going to happen here.”⁹

The Cuban armed forces, with Fidel Castro as commander-in-chief and Raúl Castro as second-in-command, are fully politicized, with the PCC acting as overseer. Since 1975, PCC organization has reached from top to bottom within the military. Political instruction for every member of the military is mandatory, systematic, and is carried out almost daily for new draftees and non-officers. The National Commission of the Party in the Armed Forces, headed by Raúl Castro, selects the political instructors.

⁵ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 45.

⁶ Freedom House. “Cuba,” *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1995-1996* (New York: Freedom House, 1996), p. 199. Rabkin, Rhoda. “Human Rights and Military Rule in Cuba,” *Cuban Communism*, Eighth Edition, Horowitz, Irving Louis, Ed., (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), p. 671-672.

⁷ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 7

⁸ Tamayo, Juan O. “Cuban Communists Overhaul Ruling Panel,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 11 October 1997). Rohter, Larry. “Cuba’s Communists Peer Ahead, They Opt to March in Place,” *New York Times* (New York: 12 October 1997).

⁹ Kovaleski, Serge F. “Castro Appears Strong, Cuban Economy Weak,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 11 October 1997).

Members of the military who do not join the PCC or its youth branch, the Union of Communist Youth, are almost never promoted above the rank of non-commissioned officer (the PCC controls admission to officer school) and may be otherwise ostracized. Because of the discipline-based military command structure, refusal by any soldier to participate in PCC instruction and activities is considered insubordination and grounds for punishment, as is the expression of political opinion or any other behavior deemed not to be in accord with PCC training and ideology.¹⁰

The Cuban judiciary is constitutionally subordinated to the executive and legislative branches. Article 121 of the Constitution states:

The courts constitute a system of state organs...subordinate hierarchically to the National Assembly of People's Power and the Council of State.

Article 121 further grants the Council of State the authority to exercise

...the legislative initiative and regulatory power to make decisions and issue rules binding on all the courts, and on the basis of this, to give binding instructions in order to establish a uniform judicial practice in the interpretation and enforcement of the law.

Moreover, Articles 125 and 126 of the Constitution provide for a system of oversight that requires judges to provide regular accounts of their work to the PCC-controlled political bodies that appoint them and have the power to remove them at will.

III. OPPOSITION OUTLAWED BY THE CONSTITUTION

Amendments to the Constitution made by the PCC at its 1991 congress reaffirmed the illegality of any political or civic activity outside the structures of the state. Although the charter, in Article 54, still appears to grant certain rights regarding freedom of association and assembly, these rights are subordinated to the construction and preservation of Communist rule, as stated in Article 62:

None of the freedoms recognized for citizens may be exercised against the provisions of the Constitution and the laws, nor against the existence and ends of the socialist state, nor against the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Infractions of this principle are punishable.

Freedom of expression is similarly circumscribed by Article 53, which states:

¹⁰ Walker, Phyllis Greene. "Political-Military Relations Since 1959," in *Conflict and Change in Cuba*, Enrique A. Baloyra and James A. Morris, Eds., (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), p. 116-122. Fernández, Damián J. "Historical Background: Achievements, Failures, and Prospects," in *The Cuban Military Under Castro*, Jaime Suchlicki, Ed. (Coral Gables, FL: North-South Publications, University of Miami, 1989), p. 11-22.

Freedom of speech and the press are recognized for citizens consistent with the purposes of socialist society. The material conditions for their exercise are present by the fact that the press, radio, television, the cinema and other mass media are state-owned or socially owned and can never be privately owned, which ensures their use exclusively in the service of the working people and in the interest of society.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS), in the chapter on Cuba in its most recent annual report,

...considers that the Cuban Constitution clearly establishes the legal bases for censorship, since the state is the only one that can determine whether oral or written expression, the right to association and assembly, or the other rights set forth in the Constitution are contrary to the prevailing political system.¹¹

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights further states:

There are no legal means for openly challenging the policies of the Government or Party, or competing as a group, movement, or political party organization for the right to govern, to replace the Communist Party and its leaders by peaceful means, and to develop new and different policies...it is impossible to make open and organized criticism of the policies of the Government and the Party that might hold top leaders accountable or make them susceptible to being removed from office.¹²

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concludes that the regime in Cuba is “a totalitarian political system,”¹³ as the Cuban Constitution

...eliminates any possibility of defense for the individual before the power of the state, and confers constitutional protection on the arbitrary exercise of power against the people of Cuba.¹⁴

¹¹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 678. The Commission was not given permission by the Cuban government to send a delegation to Cuba. The Commission states on p. 671 that it “drew on several sources in preparing this report, such as the testimony of victims who have suffered violations of their rights in Cuba, complaints brought against the Cuban State, and an abundance of information provided by non-governmental organizations in Cuba and abroad.” The citations of the Commission’s report which appear in this study are drawn from the English version of the report, and in some cases the Spanish-to-English translation has been corrected by the author of this study.

¹² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 679.

¹³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 686.

The only softening evident at the fourth PCC congress in 1991 concerned relations between the state and the Catholic Church. After seizing power in 1959, the Castro government nationalized church property and closed Catholic schools. However, since the Cuban economic crisis that began with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union (1989-1991), the government has eased restrictions on worship. At the fourth PCC congress the Constitution was amended to allow practicing Christians to be members of the PCC, and the state, previously atheist, was declared to be “secular.”¹⁵

In 1997, Fidel Castro agreed to a visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II on January 21-25, 1998, an attempt by the Cuban government to gain greater international recognition even as it steps up repression against dissidents. Since the fourth PCC congress, the Catholic church has attempted, with some success, to test the limits of the government’s desire to project a more tolerant image abroad. A more detailed discussion of the current dynamic between the government and the Catholic Church, and the situation of worshipers in general, is discussed in Chapter XVI, Section D, of this report.

IV. THE PENAL CODE

The restrictive constitutional framework is supplemented by the Cuban Penal Code which, as summarized by the executive director of Human Rights Watch/Americas, provides a solid legal foundation for the repression of political dissidence.¹⁶

Although many of the crimes defined by the Penal Code do not necessarily target the exercise of basic political and civil rights, “they are so ambiguously and broadly

¹⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 688.

¹⁵ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 34. Pax Christi Netherlands is a self-described “progressive” human rights group of the Roman Catholic Church with offices in 25 nations. The group is known in Latin America for its investigations and denunciations of human rights violations by right-wing and military governments in Latin America in the 1980s. The group publicly opposes the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba.

¹⁶ Vivanco, José Miguel. “European Muscle Needed to Change Castro’s Policy,” *European Voice* (19-25 September 1996), p.14-15 - as reprinted in *Cuba Brief*, Freedom House (New York: January 1997), p. 12-13.

defined that they may be discriminatorily applied to prevent Cubans from exercising these rights.”¹⁷

Among the most serious crimes under the Penal Code as it pertains to suppressing political rights are *rebeldía*, or “rebellion,” which is defined as acting with the intention to depose the Cuban government; *sabotaje*, “sabotage”; and *terrorismo*, “terrorism.” Conviction usually results in lengthy prison sentences. Until 1993-1994 these charges were frequently brought against individuals for their peaceful advocacy of democracy and respect for human rights.

For example, independent journalist Yndamiro Restano Díaz, an avowed pacifist, was convicted of “rebellion” in 1992 for leading a democratic socialist organization, *El Movimiento Armonía*, The Harmony Movement, which advocated changing the government through peaceful means. Restano was sentenced to ten years in prison, even though the prosecution’s witnesses affirmed at his trial that Restano was a pacifist who never advocated violence.¹⁸ Restano was subsequently released on June 1, 1995, following the visit to Cuba of a human rights delegation led by Danielle Mitterand, head of the French charitable organization, *France-Liberté*, and wife of the former French prime minister, Francois Mitterand. The government said his release was unconditional, but after granting him permission later in 1995 to travel to Europe as part of his journalistic work, it prevented his return to Cuba.¹⁹

Since 1993-1994, however, as Fidel Castro has attempted to improve his government’s human rights image as part of an effort to attract foreign investment and build international support against the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba, the Cuban state has resorted more to charging dissidents with crimes punishable by shorter prison

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvements Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 8. According to Human Rights Watch/Americas, this report was based, in part, on information gathered in Cuba in April 1995 by an international delegation that included José Miguel Vivanco, executive director of Human Rights Watch/Americas. The delegation, led by Danielle Mitterand, head of the French charitable organization, *France-Liberté*, and wife of former French Prime Minister, Francois Mitterand, has been the only international group permitted access to political prisoners by the Cuban government thus far in this decade.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvements Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 8.

¹⁹ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 5.

sentences and with offenses that are less overtly political.²⁰ The articles of the Penal Code now used more frequently to suppress dissent include:²¹

- Article 144, which defines the crime of *desacato*, or “disrespect.” It states that anyone who threatens, slanders, defames, insults, harms or in anyway outrages or offends, verbally or in writing, the dignity or honor of an authority, public official, or their agents or auxiliaries, in the exercise of their functions or because of them can be imprisoned for between three months and one year or fined or both. If the act of disrespect is directed at the head of state or other senior officials the penalty is a prison term from one to three years.
- Articles 208 and 209, which define the crime of *asociación ilícita*, or “illicit association.” These articles state that anyone belonging to an unregistered association can be fined or imprisoned for between one and three months. The promoters or leaders of such an association can be fined or imprisoned for between three months and a year. Anyone who participates in illegal meetings or demonstrations can be fined or imprisoned for between one and three months. The organizers of illegal meetings or demonstrations can be fined or imprisoned for between three months and a year.
- Article 103, which defines the crime of *propaganda enemiga*, or “enemy propaganda.” It states that anyone who incites against the social order, international solidarity or the socialist state by means of verbal, written or any other kind of propaganda, or who makes, distributes or possesses such propaganda, can be imprisoned from between one to eight years. Anyone who spreads false news or malicious predictions likely to cause alarm or discontent among the population, or public disorder, can be imprisoned from between one and four years. If the mass media are used, the sentence can be from seven to fifteen years in prison.
- Article 207, which defines the crime of *asociación para delinquir*, or “associating with others to commit crimes.” It states that if three or more persons join together in a group to commit crimes, they can be imprisoned for between one and three years, simply for meeting together. If the only objective of the group is to provoke disorder or interrupt family or public parties, spectacles or other community events or to commit other anti-social acts, the penalty is a fine or a prison sentence of between three months and one year.
- Article 115, which defines the crime of *difusión de falsas informaciones contra la paz internacional*, or “dissemination of false information against international peace.” It states that anyone who spreads false news with aim of disturbing international peace

²⁰ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 2. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 7.

²¹ Summaries of the Penal Code articles are taken in large part from Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/96, July 1996); and Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996).

or putting in danger the prestige or credit of the Cuban State or its good relations with another state can be imprisoned for between one and four years.

- Article 143, which defines the crime of *resistencia*, or “resistance.” On occasion, the crime is referred to as *desobediencia*, or “disobedience.” It states that anyone who resists an official in the exercise of his duties can be imprisoned for between three months and a year or fined. If the official is trying to apprehend a criminal or someone who has escaped from prison, the penalty is a prison term from two to five years.
- Articles 72-90, which define the crime of *peligrosidad*, or “dangerousness.” These articles come under the heading, “The Dangerous Status and Security Measures,” a section of the Penal Code under which someone can be sentenced for up to four years in prison on the grounds that the authorities believe the individual has a “special proclivity” to commit crimes, even though he or she might not have actually committed a crime. These articles broadly define “dangerous” people as those who act in a manner that contradicts “socialist morality” or engage in “anti-social behavior.” Moreover, Article 75 provides for an “official warning” to people the authorities deem to be in danger of becoming “dangerous,” i.e., those who are not yet “dangerous” but who are regarded as having criminal tendencies because of their “ties or relations with people who are potentially dangerous to society, other people, and to the social, economic and political order of the socialist State...”

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concludes that because of “their lack of precision and their subjective nature,” the legal definitions of “dangerousness” and such terms as “socialist legality” and “standards of socialist coexistence,”

constitute a source of juridical insecurity which creates conditions permitting the Cuban authorities to take arbitrary action.²²

In other words, the Penal Code articles which define “dangerousness” constitute a catch-all mechanism which gives the government the legal justification for taking any citizen it wants out of circulation. As Human Rights Watch/Americas stated in October 1995:

Cubans who engage in “anti-social behavior” or violate “socialist morality” may be held in preventive detention under the “dangerousness” provisions of the criminal code for as long as four years, even without being convicted of a crime.²³

²² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 710.

²³ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 9.

According to Pax Christi Netherlands and Amnesty International, there are clear indications that the crime of “dangerousness” is used as a cover to imprison people for political reasons on the grounds that they are common delinquents.²⁴

The Penal Code also defines the crime of *salida ilegal del país*, “illegal exit from country.” Under Penal Code Articles 216 and 217, those caught trying to leave the country without the permission of the government can be fined or imprisoned for up to three years if they have not used violence and up to eight years if force or intimidation is used. In cases where passenger vessels or airplanes are hijacked, the charge is usually one of *piratería*, “piracy.” Under Penal Code Article 117, piracy carries a penalty of up to 20 years imprisonment, or a possible sentence of death if there is loss of life or risk to the lives of others.²⁵

In the past three decades, thousands of Cubans have been imprisoned for trying to leave the island without permission. In 1994, illegal exit prisoners were thought to constitute the largest category of political prisoners in Cuba. In 1990 alone, there were 335 inmates convicted of illegal exit serving time in a single prison in Havana, the *Combinado del Este*.²⁶

Under the 1995 U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement, the Cuban government promised to “ensure that no action is taken against those migrants returned to Cuba as a consequence of their attempt to emigrate illegally.”²⁷ However, the Cuban government still has neither eliminated nor amended Penal Code Articles 216 and 217 to reflect this commitment. Although recently there appears to be a trend toward lighter penalties – e.g., fines and/or house arrest – particularly in cases of first-time offenders, Articles 216 and 217 are still used to punish people for trying to leave the country without permission. That underscores the fact that the threat of punishment continues to hang over the heads of those who are returned to Cuba following attempts to leave without authorization. The current status of the U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement and the condition of Cubans who have been repatriated to Cuba are discussed in Chapter XVI, Section C, of this report.

²⁴ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 15. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Hundreds Imprisoned for “Dangerousness”* (London: AMR 25/01/94, February 1994).

²⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/96, July 1996), p. 5.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p. 5.

²⁷ White House Office of the Press Secretary, Joint Statement, 2 May 1995.

V. THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

As explained in Chapter II on the “Structure of the State,” the Cuban judiciary is constitutionally subordinated to the executive and legislative branches, and under the control of the PCC. Articles 125 and 126 of the Constitution provide for a system of oversight that requires judges to provide regular accounts of their work to the PCC-controlled political bodies that appoint them and have the power to remove them at will. Following its investigation in Cuba from July 15 to August 4, 1995, the delegation from Pax Christi Netherlands concluded:

There is no rule of law. Instead the juridical system serves as an instrument of political control...Political prisoners are not recognized as such. Those jailed for political reasons are officially labeled ‘counterrevolutionaries.’²⁸

In the most recent assessment of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights:

...in Cuba there is still de facto and de jure subordination of the administration of justice to the political authorities.²⁹

In its most recent report on Cuba, Human Rights Watch/America determined that Cuban trials

...fall short of international due process requirements. Journalists and other observers are often barred from attending [trials], violating the right to a public trial. Defense witnesses are often barred from testifying in them, violating the right to defense. In the end, defendants are almost always convicted and their convictions are almost always upheld on appeal.³⁰

The legal profession itself, as with every other profession in Cuba, is under the control of the state. Decree Law No. 81, instituted in 1984, requires that in order to practice, attorneys must belong to the *Organización Nacional de Bufetes Colectivos* (ONBC), National Organization of Collective Law Offices, which is controlled by the

²⁸ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol*, (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 15. Pax Christi Netherlands is a self-described “progressive” human rights group of the Roman Catholic Church with offices in 25 nations. The group is known in Latin America for its investigations and denunciations of human rights violations by right-wing and military governments in Latin America in the 1980s. The group publicly opposes the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba.

²⁹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 685.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch/Americas, *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 9.

PCC through the Ministry of Justice. According to this law, to attain membership in the ONBC an attorney must “have moral characteristics in accordance with the principles of our society,” which in practice has impeded the entry of those who dissent from the political system in place.³¹

Elections for ONBC directors are controlled by the PCC, and ONBC directors use systematic intimidation against those holding opinions counter to the political line of the organization. In 1996, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

received many complaints that describe arbitrary detentions, summonses to appear before police authorities and prosecutors, expulsions from law offices, and even prison sentences for lawyers who sought to exercise their profession independently.³²

The Inter-American Commission also received information about irregularities during trials of individuals charged with crimes of a political nature. The Commission noted that in these cases, hearing rooms are filled with police and State Security agents who impede access to journalists and the public; defendants are not given sufficient time to examine case files before trial; and defendants are often denied access to defense attorneys until, in many cases, the moment the trial begins. The Commission notes further that while there are no legal grounds to prevent defense witnesses, defense witnesses are rare because of “the fear of reprisals by the State.” Finally, the Commission notes the Cuban state policy

...of intimidating defense attorneys for persons detained on political grounds, who run the risk of being accused, in reprisal, for the mere fact of having such clients.³³

Similarly, Amnesty International noted in an April 1996 report on Cuba that,

...in cases of a political nature, the role of the defense lawyer is severely limited...In recent years the few defense lawyers who have been more

³¹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 688.

³² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 689.

³³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 689-690.

outspoken have found themselves penalized in professional terms and sometimes dismissed or threatened with physical violence.³⁴

In its August 1997 report on Cuba, Amnesty International stated:

Very few defense lawyers, all of whom are employed by the state, are willing to argue strongly in defence of their client for fear of reprisals against themselves. Prosecution witnesses are also sometimes subjected to undue pressures to testify against the accused. Those accused of crimes against state security (which include “enemy propaganda”) are tried in provincial courts and are normally not permitted access to lawyers while in pre-trial detention. Such detention can last several weeks or months. During that period they may be subjected to psychological pressures, including threats against relatives, to sign incriminating statements...Cases involving more minor offences, such as “disrespect” or “dangerousness,” are tried in municipal courts. According to the Cuban Penal Code, the participation of a defence lawyer is “not indispensable” in municipal court cases although, if the defendant wishes, he or she may appoint one. However, in practice, the defendant frequently has no opportunity to consult a lawyer, especially when, as often happens, the relatives are not informed of the arrest or the trial takes place within a day or so of the arrest.³⁵

VI. THE PERVASIVE PRESENCE OF THE STATE

The goal of the Castro regime has been to “fuse state and society.”³⁶ The two principal, overlapping instruments are the PCC, which “rules over every level of Cuban life,”³⁷ and the Ministry of Interior (MININT). The MININT contains within it a vast, nationwide surveillance and repressive apparatus to keep the population in line. The principal departments in the MININT for exercising political and social control are the *Departamento de Seguridad del Estado* (DSE), Department of State Security, commonly referred to simply as “State Security,” and the *Departamento Técnico de Investigaciones* (DTI), Department of Technical Investigations. The headquarters of State Security is housed in a former seminary in the Havana section of Villa Marista and is often referred to simply as “Villa Marista.” Through the use of electronic surveillance, undercover

³⁴ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 3.

³⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 4.

³⁶ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 18.

³⁷ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 45.

agents and a widespread network of informants who are often coerced or blackmailed, MININT has the capability and the mandate to spy on or forcibly intrude in the lives of any citizen for any reason, anytime, anywhere. According to the U.S. Department of State:

The State has assumed the right to interfere in the lives of citizens, even those who do not actively oppose the Government and its practices.³⁸

Human Rights Watch/Americas has described the situation this way:

The violation of the right of privacy is systematic and pervasive. Tight political control in Cuba is maintained through extensive monitoring of Cubans' daily lives.³⁹

MININT, like the PCC, is deeply imbedded in the structures of the military,⁴⁰ and also controls the uniformed Revolutionary National Police (PNR).

MININT's surveillance and control of the population are enhanced by numerous PCC-controlled mass organizations, including the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDRs), Committees for the Defense of the Revolution; the *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* (CTC), Cuban Confederation of Labor; the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas* (UJC), Union of Communist Youth; the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC), Federation of Cuban Women; the *Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios* (FEU), Federation of University Students; the *Federación de Estudiantes de Escuelas Medias* (FEEM), Federation of Secondary School Students; the *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (ANAP), Association of Small Farmers; and even the *Pioneros*, Pioneers, a Scout-like organization for pre-adolescent youth. The FEEM and the FEU are frequently mobilized into *Brigadas Estudiantiles de Trabajo* (BETs), Student Work Brigades, for collective work in agriculture and in construction brigades.

The CDRs are a nationwide network of neighborhood block associations which act as appendages of the state security apparatus, operating as its eyes and ears on a daily basis. The CDRs were founded in 1960 as a defense against violent counterrevolution and developed into a ubiquitous mechanism of social and political control. The CDR system, like all mass organizations in Cuba, is organized like a pyramid. There is a national directorate headed by a national coordinator. At the next level are the fourteen

³⁸ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Washington, DC: February 1997), p. 419.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Stifling Dissent in the Midst of Crisis* (New York, February 1994), p. 4.

⁴⁰ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 41.

CDR provincial committees, and beneath those are regional, municipal and zone committees. The zone CDRs oversee the individual block committees.⁴¹

CDR members spy on their neighbors and, in turn, urge them to spy on others and fill out “Opinion Collection Forms” about what they hear their neighbors and colleagues saying during the course of daily life, particularly their political opinions. The completed forms are then passed on by the CDRs to the police and MININT. The CDRs also rely on networks of *chivatos*, “stool pigeons,” to gather information on people’s behavior.⁴² The CDRs operate in conjunction and overlap with the CTC, the UJC, the FMC, and the FEU, which perform the same functions in the workplace and in the schools. The failure to report criminal activity, including political “crimes,” is itself considered a crime punishable under Cuban law.⁴³ In assessing the penetration of the state into daily life, one young man said to the delegation from Pax Christi Netherlands, “I can’t even trust my friends.”⁴⁴

Another organization whose purposes include social and political control is the Territorial Troop Militia (MTT). The MTT was established in 1980 under the direction of the PCC and in 1992 had an estimated 1.5 million people under paramilitary discipline.⁴⁵ The stated purpose of the MTT was to defend against foreign invasion, but the MTT is foremost a political instrument for mobilizing a discontented populace, intensifying political indoctrination and reinforcing a garrison state mentality.⁴⁶

In sum, there is no official organization that is not geared to combat and root out dissent and disaffection with the political system. State Security, the array of PCC-controlled mass organizations and the MTT comprise an integrated system of organized surveillance and informing on a massive scale.

Cuba’s severe economic problems since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc appear to have undercut the effectiveness of the CDRs to some extent, particularly in terms of their ability to mobilize great numbers of people for PCC

⁴¹ Aguirre, Benigno E. “The Conventionalization of Collective Behavior,” in *Cuban Communism*, Eighth Edition, Irving Louis Horowitz, Ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), p. 391-394.

⁴² Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 11.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Stifling Dissent in the Midst of Crisis* (New York: February 1994), p. 4.

⁴⁴ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Gonzales, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Gouré, Leon. “Cuban Military Doctrine and Organization” in *The Cuban Military Under Castro*, Jaime Suchlicki, Ed. (Coral Gables, FL: North-South Publications, University of Miami, 1989), p. 84-86.

gatherings and activities, another of their prescribed functions. However, during a ten-day trip to Cuba in the spring of 1995 by this writer, most ordinary Cubans in Havana and the provincial cities of Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Santa Clara and Matanzas reported that they remained intensely wary of CDR surveillance, even while conversing in their own homes.⁴⁷ The delegation from Pax Christi Netherlands, which visited Cuba from July 15 to August 4, 1995, concluded:

Fear is the basic instrument of political control. The information at the State Security's disposal can be used to threaten and intimidate anybody, including those who oppose the regime, to force them to go along with the established ideology...There is no place to escape the tentacles of the State. The distrust is unbearable.⁴⁸

Pax Christi Netherlands believes, based on both official and dissident sources in Cuba, that there are currently about 80,000 CDRs.⁴⁹ That means that with a population of a little more than 11 million, Cuba has approximately one CDR for every 140 people.

VII. OPTIONS FOR CUBANS VIS-À-VIS THE STATE

Cubans are expected to voice loyalty to Fidel Castro and the Communist state. Doing so makes a person an *integrado*, someone integrated into the system. As described by Pax Christi Netherlands:

From the moment a child enters school his or her political and social insertion is more important than individual ability: whether their parents belong to the Party, attend meetings of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, or have learned the words of Fidel and Che [Guevara] by heart. When children reach adolescence they may well continue to study...They can attend universities but they cannot ask anything that is not in keeping with the prevailing Marxist materialist ideology. They leave these universities prepared to continue giving the answers expected of them by the state.⁵⁰

Being integrated is key to getting ahead, or even just getting by, because the state controls every facet of an individual's life. It decides, based on political attitude and

⁴⁷ Payne, Douglas W. "Life in Castro's Mafia State," *Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers: Rutgers University, January/February 1996), p.39-47.

⁴⁸ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 12.

⁴⁹ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p 45.

performance, what one studies in school, where one works, whether one is promoted, permission to travel, and whether one will have access to inexpensive consumer goods through one's workplace. An individual who is not integrated is considered by the government to be "disaffected" and potentially a "counterrevolutionary," the term applied to any individual whom the government believes has crossed the line from disaffection to dissent.⁵¹

Moreover, there is little middle ground. The state views political neutrality as a form of disaffection. In describing the organized informing by the CDRs and State Security, Argentine journalist and author Jacobo Timerman likens it to

...a collective state of mind in which the Cuban is, simply, a member or friend, a brother or son, of the Revolution and its Comandante [Fidel Castro]—or else, an enemy of all.⁵²

Cubans who do not support the government therefore are faced with a choice. They can feign loyalty to the government by voicing support and participating in state-sponsored organizations and activities, including informing, or they can risk the consequences of being deemed suspicious or disaffected by the state if they do not. For example, a dozen or more questions regarding someone's "integration" are routine procedure when applying for employment.⁵³

Jacobo Timerman, in assessing the content of Fidel Castro's speeches, says that Castro seems to think the regime has created "a new kind of revolutionary conscience." Timerman concludes, however,

When you go from city to city, from group to group, from person to person, it becomes clear that [Fidel Castro's] rhetoric has produced a vacuum in the conscience of the Cuban people, substituting a stifling collective paranoia. The rest—acceptance, vacillation, informing—is at the service of repression.⁵⁴

Given Cuba's ongoing economic crisis, even staunch supporters of the government have reason to be wary. The government no longer has the resources to

⁵¹ Timerman, Jacobo. *Cuba: A Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 22-23. Timerman is an acclaimed Argentine journalist and author of *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, the book based on his experience of imprisonment and torture under right-wing military rule in Argentina. Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 142-145.

⁵² Timerman, Jacobo. *Cuba: A Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 23.

⁵³ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 45.

⁵⁴ Timerman, Jacobo. *Cuba: A Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 116.

reward those it considers to be “good revolutionaries.” Today, an estimated 40 percent of the workforce is unemployed or underemployed, and the salaries of those who have full-time jobs are not enough to cover basic needs.⁵⁵ As of June 1997, Cuba’s average monthly wage was 203 pesos; at the street exchange rate of 20 pesos, that came to approximately \$10 per month.⁵⁶ Dollars were legalized by the Cuban government in 1993. Since the average monthly wage is insufficient to support a family, Cubans who do not receive dollar remittances from friends or family abroad often break the law in order to survive, either by going into the black market or stealing goods and services from the state.⁵⁷ Most recent estimates are that 20 percent or less of the population receives dollar remittances from abroad.⁵⁸

The government knows of these daily crimes and Cubans are aware that the government knows. The state often looks the other way in order to keep discontent from mounting. In recent years it also has tolerated more complaining, so long as it is about specific deficiencies, such as poor public transportation or lack of medicines in clinics, and does not cross the not always easily discernible line into criticism of the system generally. But because of the totalitarian nature of the government, Cubans know from long experience that the authorities can crack down at any time. In the words of Andres Oppenheimer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has reported from Cuba for nearly two decades, it is as if Cubans are “on a permanent probation status.”⁵⁹

Cubans compelled to break the law to survive braced themselves in 1997 when the government instituted a sweeping set of laws that provide for up to 20 years in prison for failure to stop waste and theft of state property, both common ways of diverting state property into the black market which has burgeoned in the 1990s.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 705.

⁵⁶ Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 13 June 1997).

⁵⁷ Santiago, William. “Getting By Any Way They Can: As Life Gets Tougher in Cuba, Scams are a Way of Life,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 19 February 1997). Payne, Douglas W. “Life in Castro’s Mafia State,” *Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, January/February 1996), p. 40-41.

⁵⁸ Sánchez, Isabel. *Agence France Press*. Article appeared as *Cuba: mil maneras de conseguir un dólar*, in newspaper *El Diario/La Prensa* (New York City), 10 August 1997. Payne, Douglas W. “Life in Castro’s Mafia State,” *Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, January/February 1996), p. 40.

⁵⁹ Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro’s Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 143.

⁶⁰ Tamayo, Juan O. “Sense of Despair Pervades Cuba as Economy Falters,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 2 August 1997).

New laws also have targeted the 200,000 or so Cubans who accepted the government's invitation in 1993 to try self-employment: for example, by starting in-home restaurants known as *paladares*, or by taking up one of the approximately 140 licensed trades such as shoe repair and hair-cutting. The tax and regulatory steps taken in 1997 appear designed to put an end to the experiment in limited free enterprise. By August 1997, an estimated one-tenth of the fledgling enterprises had shut down voluntarily or been closed by state inspectors.⁶¹

In a speech in April 1997, Fidel Castro painted with a political brush those who fail to abide by the new laws, declaring the following groups to be “allies of imperialism,”: those in private enterprise who did not pay the new taxes and follow the new regulations, and homeowners who rented rooms to foreign tourists. He accused these groups of “lack of social discipline,” and of “receiving encouragement from the enemies of the Revolution in order to sow discontent and disorder.” He then called on the CDRs to be vigilant against such “crimes,” because “in the Defense Committees everyone knows what everyone is doing.” Following the speech, all CDRs held “orientation” meetings on the need to root out those committing these new types of crimes.⁶²

VIII. THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT 1976-1989

In the wake of a number of attempts at armed internal resistance in the early 1960s, the Castro government arrested thousands of suspected “counterrevolutionaries” in a sustained crackdown that virtually eliminated any organized opposition, peaceful or otherwise. In 1965 there were, by Castro's own estimate, 20,000 political prisoners in Cuba.⁶³ By 1975 this number had been reduced to about 4,500 through a “rehabilitation” program which offered early release to those willing to participate in labor and political indoctrination programs. In 1979 the government released about 3,600 more prisoners following a dialogue with Cuban-Americans.⁶⁴

Between 1965 and 1975 peaceful dissent was generally limited to acts by individuals, who despite their non-violent behavior were nevertheless labeled by the

⁶¹ Darling, Juanita. “Cuban Entrepreneurs Feel the Leash Tighten,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles: 24 August 1997).

⁶² Campa, Homero. “Arrendadores, emigrantes, evasores, lúmpenes, únicos aliados del imperialismo hoy: Castro,” *Proceso* (Mexico City: 20 April 1997), p. 54-65. Campa is the long-time Havana correspondent of the Mexican newsweekly, *Proceso*.

⁶³ Lockwood, Lee. *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel* (New York: Random House, 1969), p.260.

⁶⁴ Rabkin, Rhoda. “Human Rights and Military Rule in Cuba,” in *Cuban Communism*, Eighth Edition, Irving Louis Horowitz, Ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), p.673.

government as “counterrevolutionaries” and imprisoned. The first peaceful internal opposition organization was the *Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos* (CCPDH), Cuban Committee for Human Rights, which was formed in 1976 in Havana. A number of its members had distinguished themselves during the Castro-led struggle that brought down the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959 and had subsequently endured imprisonment for holding dissident views. The CCPDH advocated the liberation of all political prisoners, respect for human rights and the establishment of a democratic rule of law in Cuba. It vowed to conduct itself in the peaceful traditions of Andrei Sakharov, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

The CCPDH was systematically persecuted by the government, its members arrested, sentenced to long prison terms and in some cases driven into exile. Human rights monitoring was and remains illegal under Cuban law,⁶⁵ and possession of a copy of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights is punishable by imprisonment under a charge of “enemy propaganda.”⁶⁶ The CCPDH’s principal founder, Ricardo Bofill, endured three prison terms, totaling ten years, before going into exile in the United States in 1988. In 1986, the CCPDH was still the only independent human rights group in Cuba. It claimed to have about 200 members in the country, but 12 of its top people were in prison.⁶⁷ Since 1988, the CCPDH has been led by Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, who fought alongside Fidel Castro in the famous guerrilla attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953. Arcos, now 71-years-old, has been a political prisoner for extended periods under both the Batista and Castro governments. As of September 1997, he still lived in a tiny apartment in the Vedado section of Havana, where he continued to take testimony and assemble information on Cuban political prisoners and human rights violations.

In 1985, the Cuban government, in the face of mounting international criticism of its human rights record, eased somewhat its repression against dissidents. In mid-1987, the government agreed to schedule a September 1988 visit from the United Nations Human Rights Commission. That prompted the formation of a second independent human rights group in October 1987, the *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional* (CCDHRN), Cuban Commission for Human Rights and

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Stifling Dissent in the Midst of Crisis* (New York: February 1994), p. 7.

⁶⁶ For example, on August 2, 1997, Juan Carlos Herrera of the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia* was arrested, held for two days and threatened by State Security with imprisonment on a charge of “enemy propaganda.” See Omar Rodríguez Saludes, “Harassment Against Guantánamo Youth Movement,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa, ANP* (Havana: 22 August 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

⁶⁷ Bowman, Tom. “Cuba Human Rights Group Sets up Charter in Miami,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 3 December 1986).

National Reconciliation. Its principal founder was Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz, a former philosophy professor at the University of Havana, from which he was expelled in 1967 for criticizing the “cult of personality” around Fidel Castro.

The CCDHRN, like the CCPDH, collected information on human rights abuses and distributed it to foreign embassies and international organizations. Both groups advocated political dialogue with the government as a means to achieving a more democratic Cuba.

In 1987, CCPDH and CCDHRN members were for the first time allowed by the Cuban government to be interviewed by foreign journalists and hold indoor meetings. Also, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was finally permitted to visit Cuba’s prisons, and a number of political prisoners were released.

However, the Cuban government quickly shut this narrow opening after the visit of the delegation from the United Nations Human Rights Commission in September 1988. A number of human rights activists who had tested the apparent thaw by organizing tiny, quasi-political groups were arrested. During the visit of Mikhail Gorbachev in April 1989, about two dozen people were arrested for planning a demonstration to seek the Soviet leader’s support for *glasnost*, free expression, in Cuba. By the end of the summer of 1989, over three dozen rights activists and dissidents had been jailed. By 1990, the Cuban government had revoked the ICRC’s permission to visit Cuba’s prisons.⁶⁸ Of the 87 individuals interviewed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in September 1988, a year later 22 were in prison,⁶⁹ including Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz. In early 1992, Human Rights Watch/Americas reported that more than 200 Cuban human rights monitors and activists had been arrested since 1989, that 42 were serving jail terms and 11 others were awaiting trial.⁷⁰

By 1996, Elizardo Sánchez was out of jail, having spent a total of more than nine years as a political prisoner. As of September 1997, Sánchez, 54-years-old, continued to direct the CCDHRN from his home in Havana, taking testimony and assembling information on human rights violations which he sends abroad.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Marquis, Christopher. “Rights Group: EU Economic Policy in Cuba Unjustified,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 21 September 1996).

⁶⁹ Freedom House. “Cuba,” *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1989-1990* (New York: 1996), p. 82-83.

⁷⁰ Whitefield, Mimi. “Repression on the Rise, Says Rights Group,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 1 March 1992).

⁷¹ Sánchez Santa Cruz, Elizardo. “Cuba Can’t Change on Its Own,” *New York Times* (New York: 22 April 1997).

IX. THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT 1990-1994

Despite the Cuban government's crackdown against dissent in 1989-1990 following the slight thaw in 1985-1988, the dissident movement continued to grow. It was inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse in 1991 of the Soviet Union, and the 1991 vote of the United Nations to assign for the first time a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba. By 1991 more than a dozen new groups had emerged to test the regime's strength and tolerance.

In 1991, six small organizations with links to the conservative Cuban-American National Foundation in Miami formed the *Coalición Democrática Cubana*, Cuban Democratic Coalition. In the first week of September of that year, about a dozen individuals representing the Coalition staged a protest demonstration in front of the headquarters of State Security in the Havana section of Villa Marista. The protesters were violently dispersed and Coalition leader Daniel Azpillaga Lombard was arrested.⁷²

That same week, leaders of eight other dissident groups met in the home of CCDHRN leader Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz to form the center-left *Concertación Democrática Cubana* (CDC), Cuban Democratic Concertation. A few weeks later, at the time of the fourth PCC congress and not long after Mikhail Gorbachev had announced an end to military aid to Cuba, the Concertation held a press conference in Sánchez's home for more than fifty foreign journalists. It issued a proposal calling for a general amnesty for political prisoners, government recognition of political and human rights organizations, and free national elections.⁷³

The Cuban government found the Concertation more threatening than the conservative Cuban Democratic Coalition because it vowed to preserve the revolution's social gains and was far more popular among the Cuban population. Virtually all of the Concertation members had at one time supported the revolution and a number of them now declared themselves social democrats.

The crackdown against the Concertation began with the arrest in November 1991 of María Elena Cruz Varela, one of the island's best known dissidents and leader of the *Criterio Alternativo*, Alternative Criterion, a group of dissident intellectuals that had joined the Concertation. A mob organized by State Security stormed her home, dragged her down the stairs and forced her to eat an Alternative Criterion leaflet. She was

⁷² Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 377-378.

⁷³ Kean, Christopher. *Diez Días en Cuba: Mensaje de la disidencia a la diáspora* (New York: Freedom House, 1992), p. xv-xviii, p. 2-4. Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p.378-379.

subsequently arrested, convicted of spreading “enemy propaganda,” and sentenced to two years in jail.⁷⁴ Following her prison term, Cruz Varela went into exile in the United States.

In the ensuing months many other Concertation leaders were arrested and jailed. The incarceration of Yndamiro Restano Díaz, independent journalist and head of the *Movimiento Armonía*, Harmony Movement, is described in Chapter IV on the Penal Code. Other Concertation members arrested included José Luis Pujol and Jorge Quintana, leaders of the *Proyecto Apertura de la Isla* (PAIS), Opening of the Island Project; María Celina Rodríguez, leader of *Libertad y Fe*, Liberty and Faith, an organization focusing on religious rights; and Luis Alberto Pita Santos, Lázaro Loreto, and Ramón Rodríguez, leaders of the *Asociación Defensora de los Derechos Políticos* (ADEPO), Association in Defense of Political Rights, a group of mostly young dissidents.⁷⁵

The crackdown extended to the CCPDH, which had not joined the Concertation but supported its goals of a peaceful transition to democracy through negotiations with the government and free elections. Sebastián Arcos Bergnes, a principal CCPDH figure and brother of CCPDH leader Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, was arrested in January 1992, convicted the following October of spreading “enemy propaganda,” and sentenced to four years and eight months in prison. In prison he was denied proper medical treatment for rectal cancer and suffered greatly.⁷⁶ He was released on May 31, 1995, following the visit to Cuba of a human rights delegation led by Danielle Mitterand, head of the French charitable organization, *France-Liberté*, and wife of the former French president, Francois Mitterand. In September 1995, Sebastián Arcos went into exile in the United States, having spent a total of eleven years in prison under both the Batista and Castro regimes.

In total, during the period 1991-1993, dozens of prominent dissidents associated with the Concertation and the CCPDH were convicted and given substantial prison sentences or placed under *prisión domiciliar*, house arrest, for an array of offenses,

⁷⁴ Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 335, 378.

⁷⁵ Kean, Christopher. *Diez Días en Cuba: Mensaje de la disidencia a la diáspora* (New York: Freedom House, 1992) p. xv-xviii.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p.14.

particularly “enemy propaganda,” but also including “rebellion,” “illicit association” and “disrespect.”⁷⁷

Though the Concertation and the CCPDH were severely weakened, new dissident groups continued to emerge, not only in Havana, but in other urban centers and provinces throughout the island. They included not only human rights and pro-democracy groups, but also organizations of independent trade unionists and journalists. By early 1992, more than fifty dissident groups of one sort or another existed, most having been formed after 1989.⁷⁸

The *Comisión Nacional de Sindicatos Independientes* (CONSI), National Commission of Independent Unions, an umbrella organization for five independent Cuban trade unions, was formed in February 1993.⁷⁹ The five member unions were:

- *Unión General de Trabajadores de Cuba* (UGTC) - General Union of Cuban Workers.
- *Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Cubanos* (USTC) - Syndicated Union of Cuban Workers.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Ciudad Habana* (UTCH) - Union of Workers of the City of Havana.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Provincia Habana* (UTPH) - Union of Workers of the Province of Havana.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Comercios* (UTC) - Union of Commercial Workers.

These unions were formed mainly by unemployed workers who had lost their jobs because of human rights or independent trade union activities.⁸⁰ From the start, CONSI affiliates and their members faced frequent harassment, including beatings and short-term detentions and penetration by undercover government agents.⁸¹ Under such pressure, which was heightened by internal differences regarding the U.S. economic embargo, CONSI eventually came apart. Still, its affiliates remained in existence or evolved into

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Stifling Dissent in the Midst of Crisis* (New York: February 1994), p. 7-14.

⁷⁸ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 34.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p.16.

⁸⁰ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. *Report on ICFTU/ORIT Mission to Cuba - February 8-13, 1996* (Brussels: 1996), p. 6. The ICFTU is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. ORIT is the *Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores*, Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, the ICFTU's Latin American affiliate.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p.16.

new union organizations. The current situation of independent trade unions is described in Chapter XVI, Section A, Part 3, of this report.

The first organization of independent journalists, the *Asociación de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (APIC2), Association of Independent Cuban Journalists, was created by Yndamiro Restano Díaz in 1988-1989. At the time of his arrest and incarceration in 1991 (described in Chapter IV), Restano was preparing an issue of his bulletin, *Opinión*. Following Restano's imprisonment, journalist Néstor Baguer became director of APIC2 and renamed it *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, Independent Press Agency of Cuba. By mid-1995, there were at least three independent journalists organizations: APIC; *Patria*, Fatherland, founded by Roxana Valdivia Castilla in the central province of Ciego de Avila; and *Habana Press*, Havana Press, launched by Rafael Solano. Solano and many of the other journalists involved had worked for the state media and been fired for "ideological incompatibility."⁸² The journalists working for the new agencies immediately became targets of harassment, intimidation and short-term detentions by police and State Security.⁸³

X. NEW INSTRUMENTS OF CONTROL - RAPID RESPONSE BRIGADES AND THE UNIFIED SYSTEM OF VIGILANCE AND PROTECTION (SUVP)

In response to the emergence of new dissident organizations, bolder dissident actions, and the deepening economic crisis, the Cuban government in 1991 developed new instruments of control. In fall 1990, Fidel Castro had announced that Cuba was entering a "special period in peacetime," a euphemism for a drastic austerity program involving severe cutbacks in energy consumption and more stringent rationing of food and consumer items.⁸⁴ The government, aware of mounting discontent over severe economic hardship, was intent on preventing the type of popular mobilizations which had led to the fall of regimes in Eastern Europe.

In early 1991, the government prepared for potential unrest and stepped-up dissident activity by creating the *Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida*, Rapid Response Brigades, under the direction of the MININT. The task of the brigades, according to the government, was

⁸² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 5.

⁸³ Reporters Sans Frontières. *Cuba: Exile or Prison*, English translation (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 1996), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Freedom House. "Cuba," *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1991-1992* (New York: 1992), p. 169.

to defend the country, the Revolution and socialism in all circumstances, by confronting and liquidating any sign of counterrevolution or crime.⁸⁵

The brigades are made up of regime supporters recruited from CDRs, other mass organizations and workplaces, and organized by State Security. Their principle mission is to carry out *actos de repudio*, acts of repudiation, which entail violent mob actions against dissidents or suspected dissidents, their homes, and any public demonstration of dissent. The mobs can involve up to hundreds of people who wield chains, bats and lengths of pipe. They shout slogans and threats, throw rocks and other crude missiles, deface homes with graffiti and otherwise damage property. The mobs are frequently invasive, breaking down doors and windows to carry out physical attacks against the occupants. The assault against dissident María Elena Cruz Varela in November 1991, described in Chapter IX on “The Dissident Movement 1990-1994,” was conducted by one of these brigades.

Two months after the assault on Cruz Varela, CCDHRN leader Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz was besieged for fifteen hours by a Rapid Response Brigade of between three and five hundred people. The mob destroyed his garage, where he had his office, and his files. It tried to break down the back door to his house, but could not penetrate the steel bars he had erected. It shattered the windows and threw pots of paint and bottles of ink against the walls. It called for Sánchez to come out and face his accusers. The mob was directed by police, who called for Sánchez to come out so they could protect him. Sánchez was able to record on tape part of the incident, during which the police officer in charge was heard instructing the mob to beat Sánchez with their fists and feet if he were to come out.⁸⁶

Following is a more recent action by a Rapid Response Brigade, as reported by Human Rights Watch/Americas. It was carried out on August 10, 1995, at the Havana home of Victoria Ruíz Labrit, president of the *Comité Cubano de Opositores Pacíficos Independientes*, Cuban Committee of Peaceful and Independent Opposition. A mob of 60 to 80 people armed with pipes and chains surrounded her home in order to prevent a meeting of dissidents. Then, two officials, one from the National Assembly of People’s Power, the governments legislative body, and the other from the PCC-controlled Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), came to her door. They stated they had been

⁸⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Newhouse, John. “A Reporter at Large—Socialism or Death,” *The New Yorker* (New York: 27 April 1992), p. 56. Article cited in Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND 1992), p. 14.

informed that a “counterrevolutionary” meeting was scheduled to take place in her home, and threatened to beat Ruíz and members of her family and to smash up their house if the meeting were held.⁸⁷

One immediate goal of the Rapid Response Brigades was to ensure against disruption of the fourth PCC congress in October 1991. In the months before and after the congress, nearly every prominent dissident group was the target of brigade actions. More generally, the regime formed the brigades to stifle public protest and mounting dissident activity before it could reach the point where the military would be needed to put down opposition. The Cuban government was fully aware of the military’s refusal to fire on antigovernment demonstrators in some Eastern European countries, and the brutal repression by troops in others, each of which had contributed to the unraveling of Communist regimes. Moreover, the government could portray the brigades, domestically and abroad, as a demonstration of the “people” defending the revolution, even as it was evident that brigade actions were coordinated by State Security.⁸⁸

Actions by the Rapid Response Brigades, a form of psychological terror, are designed to intimidate dissidents or anyone else harboring views different from those of the state. They can culminate in arrest, as in the case of María Elena Cruz Varela, or not, as in the case of the assault a few months later against Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz. The aim is to keep targets, potential targets, their families and friends, and anyone else witnessing or hearing about these highly public repressive measures, in a perpetual state of anxiety.

During the period 1991-1993, a majority of those targeted by the Rapid Response Brigades eventually were imprisoned or subjected to short-term detention. The government clearly intended to keep anything like the mass demonstrations which had occurred in Eastern Europe from happening in Cuba. In fact, one high level Cuban official told Cuba specialist Gillian Gunn that the government preferred “to arrest dissidents now rather than have to shoot them later.”⁸⁹

That dovetails with Fidel Castro’s long desire to distinguish his rule from the former Batista regime in Cuba and right-wing military regimes in Latin America and elsewhere. Although Cubans have not had to face death squads, instruments like the

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 24.

⁸⁸ Oppenheimer, Andres. *Castro’s Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 313-314.

⁸⁹ Gunn, Gillian. speaking on “The Current Situation in Cuba” at the Americas Society conference, *Cuba at the Turning Point*, New York City, 13 March 1992. Cited in Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 14.

Rapid Response Brigades, as part of an overall system of surveillance and repression, can have a similarly chilling effect. As an unidentified CCDHRN representative said to a delegation to Cuba from Pax Christi Netherlands in 1995:

While during the Batista period people who protested against the regime were assassinated, now they are psychologically terrorized and brainwashed. This is more difficult to gauge because the damage inflicted cannot be measured and it does not leave scars.⁹⁰

The second new instrument of control was the *Sistema Único de Vigilancia y Protección* (SUVP), the Unified System of Vigilance and Protection. Implemented in December of 1991, the SUVP is coordinated by State Security through the CDRs and the national police and adds another level of surveillance to the existing CDR structures and the CDR vigilance committees.⁹¹ Also in 1991, to improve the performance and efficiency of the CDRs themselves, Fidel Castro appointed Brig. Gen. Sixto Batista as national chief of the CDRs, the first time this mass organization had been headed by a military officer.⁹²

The SUVP originally focused on rooting out the crime of *peligrosidad*, “dangerousness,” which is explained in detail in Chapter IV of this report on “The Penal Code.” The creation of the SUVP was announced, in fact, soon after the crime of dangerousness had been established and added to the Penal Code. The purpose of the SUVP, as stated by the government, was to expose people who are “dangerous” to society due to “apparent deviations in their conduct.” This can result in the national police opening a “dangerous status” file on them, which can lead to arrest and imprisonment for up to four years.⁹³

Since 1994, however, the scope of the SUVP has widened. Beginning in that year, the government lessened the frequency and severity of acts of repudiation by the Rapid Response Brigades against dissidents, following stepped-up international criticism

⁹⁰ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 10.

⁹¹ Gonzalez, Edward and Ronfeldt, David. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World*, (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1992), p. 10.

⁹² Freedom House. “Cuba,” *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1991-1992* (New York: 1992), p. 168-169.

⁹³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 680.

of these types of assaults.⁹⁴ Still, such brigade actions continued to take place intermittently, signaling dissidents and the population in general that the brigades remained part of the government's arsenal and that their actions could be stepped up at any time.

Meanwhile, the government began to make greater use of SUVP-organized groups to target dissidents, using less violent means, at least at the start. Rather than *actos de repudio*, acts of repudiation, involving wholesale attacks on the target's home, SUVP groups can either invite the target to a *mitin de repudio*, repudiation meeting, or insist upon entering the home to hold such a meeting if the target declines. The groups then verbally assault the target, threaten jail terms, and on occasion ransack the premises and physically rough up the target. Repudiation meetings soon became common instruments against independent journalists, whose numbers had been growing since 1994. The use of SUVP repudiation meetings increased in 1996, and again in 1997, when they became increasingly more violent and in a number of instances approached the level of intimidation characteristic of Rapid Response Brigades. In the first five months of 1997 there were more than a dozen SUVP repudiation meetings against independent journalists alone.⁹⁵

XI. THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT 1995-1996 - *CONCILIO CUBANO*

In 1995, Cuban dissidents sought to take advantage of the slight relaxation of repressive measures by the Cuban government. Dissident efforts led to the formation of the *Concilio Cubano*, an unprecedented umbrella organization which would eventually unite more than 130 groups from throughout the island before the government took measures to neutralize it in early 1996.

Over the past decade and a half, repression in Cuba has occurred in waves. Severe repression in the early 1980s gave way to a slight thaw in 1985-88, as the Cuban government seemed to respond to mounting international criticism of Cuba's human rights record. The thaw was followed by a crackdown in 1989, and the introduction of the Rapid Response Brigades and the SUVP in 1991, as described in the preceding chapter of this report. The crackdown seemed to reach a fever pitch on July 13, 1994,

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 24. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 10.

⁹⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists. *Letter to Fidel Castro* (New York: 17 June 1997). The letter, distributed to the media, lists attacks against independent journalists by the SUVP. Cuba Program, Freedom House. *Cuba's Independent Journalists Under Attack by Castro Regime: A Summary of the Current Situation of Independent Journalists in Cuba* (Washington, D.C.: 15 August 1997.)

when a state-owned tugboat hijacked from Havana harbor by 72 civilians was deliberately rammed and sunk by a Cuban vessel, killing 41 people.⁹⁶

The sinking of the *13 de Marzo* prompted a new round of international reproach, at a time when the Cuban government could least afford it. Cuba's economic crisis had continued to worsen in 1993-1994, and the government was desperately seeking foreign investment to avoid what Fidel Castro had warned two years earlier was the "Zero Option," in effect, the devolution into a pre-industrialized society.⁹⁷ At the same time, intensifying poverty was fomenting social tension and contributing to a steady increase in the number of Cubans attempting to leave the country illegally. Each year since 1990 had seen more than 2,000 Cuban *balseiros*, rafters, reach the United States, with a record number of over 3,500 arriving in 1993.⁹⁸

In August 1994, thousands rioted in Havana when police tried to stop a group of Cubans from launching a raft. The following day, Fidel Castro announced the government would no longer stop people from trying to leave the island. In part, this was a safety-valve measure reminiscent of the 1980 Mariel exodus of 120,000 Cubans, when Castro had also opened the gates in an effort to get rid of the most disaffected Cubans.⁹⁹ Thus began the flight of over 35,000 people, most of whom were picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard and sent to camps at U.S. military bases in Panama and Guantánamo at the eastern end of Cuba. The episode led to the 1994 and 1995 U.S.-Cuba immigration agreements, which called for, among other things, Cuba to stop the flow of rafters and the U.S. to allow entry to up to 20,000 Cubans each year in a variety of immigration categories. The current status of these agreements and the condition of Cubans who have been repatriated under them, are discussed in Chapter XVI, Section C, of this report.

The August 1994 riots were a public display of popular discontent unprecedented since the beginning of the revolution. The government responded with a renewed crackdown against dissident groups, to keep them from taking advantage of a level of popular disaffection the government itself seemed to have underestimated. The crackdown, combined with the riots and the sinking of the *13 de Marzo* that preceded it, severely tarnished Cuba's image abroad and Fidel Castro soon maneuvered to improve it.

⁹⁶ Tamayo, Juan O. "OAS Assails Cuba Over Sinking of Tug," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 7 November 1996).

⁹⁷ Freedom House. "Cuba," *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1994-1995* (New York: 1995), p. 208-209.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, The Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York, October 1994), p.7-8.

⁹⁹ Llovio-Menéndez, José Luis. *Insider: My Hidden Life as a Revolutionary in Cuba* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 387. The author is a former Cuban official who was in government at the time of the Mariel exodus.

In November 1994, the Castro government allowed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights José Ayala Lasso to visit Cuba, even as it continued to bar the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Amb. Carl-Johan Groth, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Cuba, from the island. In April 1995, a delegation led by Danielle Mitterand, head of the French charitable organization *France-Liberté* and wife of former French president Francois Mitterand, was permitted to come to Cuba. From October 1994 to July 1995, a number of high-profile political prisoners were released. In the continuation of a disturbing new trend, however, many of the prisoners were released on the condition that they leave Cuba, a form of “forced exile” which is described further in Chapter XII of this report. Also, in May 1995, the Cuban government ratified the International Convention Against Torture, and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

This diplomatic offensive by the Cuban government was clearly designed to gain international respectability, end its isolation, and combat the U.S. economic embargo and the then-pending Helms-Burton legislation to strengthen the embargo. The goals were to secure foreign investment, gain access to foreign credits, and achieve a cooperation agreement with the European Union.

In early 1995, Cuban dissidents and independent journalists moved to make the most of the government’s diplomatic offensive and its slight easing of repression. New groups and associations were formed and initiatives undertaken to unify around fundamental principles. On February 2, 1995, twelve people acting on behalf of thirteen organizations issued a document that requested “amnesty for all political prisoners [and] the legalization, in accordance with the Law of Associations, of opposition groups, human rights groups, and other groups representing diverse currents of opinion.” The thirteen organizations and the individuals who signed for them were¹⁰⁰:

- *Agramontista Corriente*, Agramontist Current - René Gómez Manzano.
- *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional* - Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation - Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz.
- *Comité de Madres Pro Amnistía “Leonor Pérez”* - Leonor Pérez Pro Amnesty Mothers’ Committee - Alicia Ramos.
- *Confederación Nacional por Derechos Políticos* - National Confederation for Political Rights - Lázaro Loreto Perea.
- *Consejo Nacional por Derechos Civiles* - National Council for Civil Rights - Jorge Omar Pimienta.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 3.

- *Coordinadora de Presos Políticos y Ex-Presos* - Coordinator of Political Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners - Aída Valdés Santana.
- *Coordinadora de Trabajadores Cubanos* - Cuban Workers Coordinator - Aída Valdés Santana.
- *Corriente Socialista Democrática* - Democratic Socialist Current - Vladimiro Roca Antúnez.
- *Frente Martiano Cívica de Mujeres* - Martiano Civic Women's Front - Mérida Pérez Fuentes.
- *Frente Unido Sindical* - United Labor Front - Evaristo Patricio.
- *Fundación Cubana por Derechos Humanos* - Cuban Foundation for Human Rights - Gisela Estévez.
- *Los Cuetos del Movimiento 24 de Febrero* - Los Cuetos of the February 24th Movement - Mario Remedio.
- *Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano Cubano* - Cuban Christian Democrat Movement - María Valdés Rosado.

The Law of Associations cited in the document signed by these thirteen groups is Law 54 of December 27, 1985. The law was decreed at the beginning of the slight thaw in repression that occurred in 1985-1988. The law, which does not apply to PCC-controlled organizations or religious groups, establishes procedures by which certain kinds of associations can be established, provided their activities do not “damage the social interest.” The law remains on the books today and many dissident organizations have applied for formal recognition from the government since the law was implemented. Applications are reviewed and decided upon by the Ministry of Justice. If recognized, the association is subject to periodic inspections and must supply the state with information about its work. Only one dissident organization has ever received a reply, and that was a denial, nearly ten years after the application had been submitted.¹⁰¹

As dissident groups moved toward greater cooperation, a similar process was occurring among independent journalists. On September 19, 1995, Yndamiro Restano Díaz, who had been released from prison on June 1, founded the *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (BPIC), Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba, to coordinate the three already existing agencies: 1) the *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba* (APIC), Independent Press Agency of Cuba, which Restano himself had established two years before his imprisonment in 1991 and was now headed by Néstor Bager; 2) *Patria*, Fatherland, founded by Roxana Valdivia in the central province of

¹⁰¹ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 1-2.

Ciego de Avila; and 3) *Habana Press*, Havana Press, launched by Rafael Solano. Solano and many of the other journalists involved had worked for the state media and been fired for “ideological incompatibility.” Valdivia had founded *Patria* after serving four months of a one-year prison term on the charge of spreading “enemy propaganda.” By the end of 1995, the BPIC encompassed at least 20 journalists working in Havana and nine of fourteen provinces.¹⁰²

Independent journalists were already taking advantage of the significant upgrade in telecommunications between Cuba and the United States in late 1994. They are prohibited from publishing newspapers or magazines, so they send their articles abroad for publication and for re-transmission back to Cuba by radio or the Internet. Articles are sent either by fax or dictated over the phone. With State Security constantly confiscating fax machines and disconnecting telephone lines, the independent journalists are always scrambling to connect with their contacts outside Cuba. Volunteers in Florida and Europe built a Florida-based web site, *CubaNet* (<http://www.cubanet.org>), for the journalists, and e-mail articles to more than 700 subscribers, including many in Cuba. Access to the Internet is prohibited by the Cuban government, except for official institutions. But those with access occasionally share it with friends and family.¹⁰³

The *Concilio Cubano* was founded on October 10, 1995, when some 40 dissident groups united around a set of principles and goals which were outlined in four points in a statement released on that date:

- The determination to work for a totally peaceful transition toward a democratic society under the rule of law, devoid of any vindictiveness, and including equally all Cubans.
- Obtaining unconditional amnesty for all political prisoners.
- Launching a series of legal transformations which will provide the necessary framework, within the law, to secure absolute respect for all universally recognized human rights, as well as equal participation by all Cubans in a process of opening which will lead to economic independence.
- The belief that in order to harmonize the peaceful transition we are advocating, with the principle of Cuba as the fatherland and the home of each and every Cuban, it is

¹⁰² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p 7. Congressional Research Service, *Cuba: Exile or Prison* (Washington, DC: May 1996), p. 1-2. The document is an English translation of a report by *Reporters Sans Frontières*, Reporters Without Frontiers, a French organization that advocates for freedom of expression.

¹⁰³ Ackerman, Elise. “Guerrilla Journalism: The Underground Press Fights for an Audience,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 9 March 1997).

essential to provide the conditions that will guarantee the participation of all Cubans, with no exclusions whatsoever.¹⁰⁴

Within two months, approximately 60 additional groups had joined the *Concilio Cubano*. By that time the umbrella organization included human rights groups, political opposition groups, independent press agencies and journalist groups, independent lawyers organizations and other professional groups, independent trade unions, youth groups, women's organizations, groups of former political prisoners, and environmental groups. Many of these groups put aside ideological differences and differing opinions regarding the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba to become part of the umbrella group. By the end of November 1995, the Miami-based *Grupo de Apoyo a Concilio Cubano* (GACC), *Concilio Cubano* Support Group, which had been formed a few weeks earlier, issued a list of 101 groups belonging to the *Concilio Cubano*, and the name of the representative signing for each group. That list appears in this report in Appendix I.

When the *Concilio Cubano* wrote Fidel Castro in mid-December to formally request permission for a public assembly to be held in Havana on February 24-27, 1996, representatives of more than 130 groups signed the letter. By one estimate the membership base of all the groups combined was around 5,000 people.¹⁰⁵ However, because of the conditions in Cuba it is extremely difficult for even the groups themselves to know the true number of members and supporters.

The *Concilio Cubano* did not wait for a reply from the government and moved ahead with organizing the event and strengthening its structure. A ten-member youth commission was formed, called *Los Pinos Nuevos*, New Pines. A seven-member support group of prominent dissidents was established, the *Grupo de Apoyo*, Support Group, which included: Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz; Gustavo Arcos Bergnes; and Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, head of the *Corriente Socialista Democrática*, Democratic Socialist Current, and son of longtime PCC stalwart Blas Roca. All three had been principal players in the formation of this dissident confederation. The *Concilio Cubano* also set up

¹⁰⁴ From the official founding statement of the *Concilio Cubano*, 10 October 1995. The English translation is by the author of this report. The complete statement, as well as other organizational information, can be found on the *Concilio Cubano* web site which is maintained by the *Grupo de Apoyo a Concilio Cubano* (GACC), Cuban Council Support Group, based in Miami: <http://www.ccsi.com/~ams/concilio/cubano.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Fainaru, Steve. "Nine Months Later, Cuba Dissidents in Disarray," *Boston Globe* (Boston: 12 November 1996).

eleven working groups to cover a number of areas, including: human rights, trade union issues, economics, finance, family affairs, ethics and international relations.¹⁰⁶

In December 1995, thirteen *Concilio Cubano* commissions were established around the country. By early February the commissions had elected two representatives each to the 26-member *Consejo Nacional Coordinador*, National Coordinating Council, which then elected a five-member *Secretariado Nacional*, National Secretariat. Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro, a 31-year-old lawyer and head of the ecological organization *NaturPaz*, NaturePeace, was elected as the national delegate of the Secretariat. The four deputy delegates elected were: Mercedes Parada Antúnez, president of the *Alianza Democrática Popular* (ADEPO2), People's Democratic Alliance, and member of the executive committee of the *Movimiento de Madres Cubanas por la Solidaridad*, Movement of Cuban Mothers for Solidarity; Héctor Palacio Ruiz, president of the *Partido Solidaridad Democrático* (PSD), Democratic Solidarity Party; Lázaro González Valdés, president of the *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* (PPDHC), Party for Human Rights in Cuba; and Reinaldo Cosano Alén, president of the *Coalición Democrática Cubana* (CDC2), Cuban Democratic Coalition.¹⁰⁷ The organizational structure of the *Concilio Cubano* as it existed in early February 1996 is outlined in Appendix II.

During its first four months of existence, *Concilio Cubano* leaders and members faced constant harassment by State Security—including short-term detentions, interrogations and threats of imprisonment on all manner of charges, even terrorism and drug trafficking—as well as intimidation by the SUVP and Rapid Response Brigades.¹⁰⁸ On February 15, 1996, nine days before the planned *Concilio Cubano* meeting in Havana, the Cuban government initiated one of the broadest police sweeps ever against dissidents. Within four days, more than a dozen top *Concilio Cubano* leaders were arrested. Among them were four of the five members of the *Concilio Cubano* national secretariat, including Dr. Morejón Almagro, the national delegate and lead organizer of the assembly. On February 16, an official of the Ministry of Interior went to the home of Gustavo Arcos Bergnes and notified him that the public meeting of the *Concilio Cubano* was prohibited.

¹⁰⁶ Statement of the *Concilio Cubano* national secretariat, distributed on 24 April 1996 by *CubaNet* (<http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>). LaFranchi, Howard. "Cuba's Tough Line on Dissent: Don't Trust Anyone Under 30," *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston: 10 April 1996).

¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 14-16.

¹⁰⁸ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 1. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 11-16.

By mid-March, about 200 of the organization's members, including many independent journalists, had been either arrested or detained for short periods and subjected to threats of imprisonment and physical violence. Homes and offices were ransacked and organizational documents and equipment seized. Throughout the crackdown, telephone lines belonging to many *Concilio Cubano* members were cut off.¹⁰⁹

The government targeted for the harshest penalties two young leaders who had emerged during the formation of the *Concilio Cubano*: the 31-year old Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro and the 35-year-old Lázaro González Valdés. Aside from their duties on the National Secretariat, both were members of the *Concilio Cubano* youth commission, *Pinos Nuevos*, New Pines. In a three-hour trial on February 22, González Valdés was found guilty of “disrespect” and “disobedience” and sentenced to fourteen months in prison. His defense lawyer was only able to speak to him minutes before the trial began and the court building was surrounded by police and a Rapid Response Brigade armed with metal bars and sticks. The next day, Dr. Morejón was tried and convicted of “resistance.” He was sentenced to six months in prison. When he appealed, he was given an additional nine-month prison sentence on a charge of “disrespect.”¹¹⁰

The crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano* continued through the spring and on into July and August of 1996, when dozens of dissidents were detained for short periods and warned not to organize commemorations on July 13, the anniversary of the sinking of the *13 de Marzo* tugboat in 1994 in which some 40 people died. For example, Aída Rosa Jiménez of the *Movimiento de Madres Cubanas por la Solidaridad*, Cuban Mothers' Solidarity Movement, was threatened with imprisonment if she went to church on July 13, and Isabel del Pino Sotolongo, president of *Seguidores de Cristo Rey*, Followers of Christ the King, was threatened with several charges after being detained for displaying photographs of the victims of the tugboat sinking and distributing leaflets containing quotes from the Bible.¹¹¹

Aside from Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro and Lázaro González Valdés, a number of other *Concilio Cubano* leaders were tried and imprisoned. They included: Juan Francisco Monzón Oviedo, an alternate member of the *Concilio Cubano* National Coordinating Council and president of the *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (PDC), Christian

¹⁰⁹ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 16-23.

¹¹⁰ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 20-21. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 9.

¹¹¹ Amnesty International. “Cuba,” *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: 1997), p. 133.

Democratic Party; and Roberto López Montañez, a leader of the *Movimiento Opositor Pacífico* “Panchito Gómez Toro,” Panchito Gómez Toro Peaceful Opposition Movement, and the *Alianza Democrática Popular* (ADEPO2), Popular Democratic Alliance. Following a summary trial on March 21, 1996, Monzón Oviedo was sentenced to six months in prison for “illicit association.” López Montañez was tried on July 16, 1996, and sentenced to one year in prison for “disrespect” and three additional months for “falsifying documents.”¹¹²

By mid-1996 the *Concilio Cubano* had been severely weakened. Its activities had been mostly driven underground and it was struggling to maintain a semblance of national organization. In August 1996, the *Concilio Cubano* issued a new list of its organizations, now reduced to about 80 member groups. The list was distributed abroad by the Miami-based GACC and appears in Appendix III of this report.

The Cuban government labeled the *Concilio Cubano* as a “counterrevolutionary” organization created and controlled by the U.S. During the first month of the crackdown, for example, an official of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Carlos Fernández de Cossio, stated to the foreign media, “We know this Concilio is a fabrication. It is an invention of the United States.”¹¹³ The Cuban government’s characterization of the groups of the *Concilio Cubano* as agents of the United States, however, ignores the fact that many of the member organizations are strongly and publicly opposed to U.S. policy toward Cuba, particularly the economic embargo. Labeling them as right-wing “counterrevolutionaries” also overlooks the reality that many of them are committed socialists.

XII. NEW TACTICS OF REPRESSION 1994-1997

The 1996 crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano* exemplified the new tactics of repression the government had been using against dissident organizations and independent journalists since 1994. Previously, the pattern had been to imprison leaders and members of such groups for several years or longer on overtly political charges like “rebellion” and spreading “enemy propaganda.” However, with Cuba’s economic crisis continuing to worsen in 1993-1994, the government was desperately seeking foreign

¹¹² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 11.

¹¹³ LaFranchi, Howard. “Cuban Dissidents Fight Image of Being U.S. Pawns,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston: 11 April 1996).

investment. It therefore needed to give the impression to the international community that there was an improvement in the human rights situation in Cuba.¹¹⁴

The new tactics adopted to give this impression include: 1) charging peaceful government opponents with less overtly political offenses and sentencing them to shorter prison terms, 2) forcing dissidents and independent journalists to go into exile by constantly intimidating them through short-term detentions and threatening them with prolonged imprisonment if they do not leave the country, 3) freeing political prisoners on the condition that they leave the country permanently, and 4) sentencing dissidents and independent journalists to *destierro*, “banishment,” a prohibition against residing in certain places, or *limitación de libertad*, “restriction of liberty,” a prohibition against leaving a certain locality or residence for any reason.¹¹⁵

Charging dissidents with less overtly political offenses allows the Cuban government to portray them as common criminals or social misfits, rather than as political prisoners who would command greater attention abroad. That is why the number of dissidents imprisoned for their peaceful political activities but convicted on other kinds of charges, usually of a spurious nature, as in the case of *Concilio Cubano* activists, has been on the increase since 1994.¹¹⁶ One example among many is the case of Reynaldo Soto Hernández, a poet and journalist for the independent news agency *CubaPress*, who also worked with the *Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos*, Cuban Committee for Human Rights, headed by Gustavo Arcos Bergnes. When Soto Hernández was arrested in September 1994, it was clearly in connection with his journalistic and human rights activities. Nonetheless, he was sentenced to three years in prison on the vague, catch-all charge of “dangerousness.” He was let out of prison on September 6, 1997, although the exact terms of his release were not known at that time.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 12-13. UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 3-8. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 7. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 695.

¹¹⁶ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 7.

¹¹⁷ International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House (IFEX), “Action Alert” (15 September 1997) - as reported on the IFEX web site at <http://www.ifex.org/>.

Similarly, the Cuban government seeks to limit criticism about the number of political prisoners it is holding by instead employing constant intimidation and short-term detentions. That, coupled with the threat of imprisonment if the targeted individual does not leave the country, and the freeing of existing political prisoners on the condition they leave the country, benefits the government in two ways. First, it removes potential and actual leaders of dissident movements from the country. Fidel Castro seems to have calculated, given the surge in peaceful opposition in recent years, that dissident leaders are more of a threat to his government inside rather than outside Cuba. Second, forced exile not only diminishes the embarrassment of holding known political prisoners. In the case of existing political prisoners it allows the Cuban government to appear cooperative in the eyes of foreign governments which have intervened on behalf of prominent dissidents who have been jailed.

According to Amnesty International, at least nine prominent dissidents and independent journalists were forced into exile in 1996, including: Mercedes Parada Antuñez, one of the four deputy national delegates of the *Concilio Cubano*; Rafael Solano, director of *Habana Press*, Havana Press; and Roxana Valdivia Castilla, director and founder of press agency *Patria*, Fatherland.¹¹⁸ According to dissident groups in Cuba, at least 60 opposition activists and independent journalists went into exile between February and November 1996.¹¹⁹

In turn, *destierro* and *limitación de libertad* are used by the Cuban government as instruments to stifle dissent without having to resort to imprisonment. *Destierro*, banishment or internal exile, is defined in Article 42 of the Penal Code. This measure can be imposed for up to ten years on anyone whose continued presence in a place is considered to be “socially dangerous.” The measure is frequently used against dissidents and independent journalists to remove them from Havana to isolated areas of the country where their ability to function or communicate with colleagues, foreign embassies or the foreign media is greatly reduced.¹²⁰

Limitación de libertad, “restricted liberty,” is defined in Article 34 of the Penal Code. This measure can be imposed for up to three years, during which time the person concerned may not change residence without permission, is not permitted to receive

¹¹⁸ Amnesty International. “Cuba,” *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: 1997), p. 133-134.

¹¹⁹ Fainaru, Steve. “Nine Months Later, Cuba Dissidents in Disarray,” *Boston Globe* (Boston: 12 November 1996).

¹²⁰ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 2. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 695.

promotion or a salary increase where they work, must appear before the court to explain their conduct if summoned, and must maintain “an honest attitude toward work, in strict accordance with the law and with respect for the norms of socialist life.”¹²¹ Article 34 also provides that the penalty of “restricted liberty” shall be carried out under the supervision and vigilance of the CDRs and other mass organizations of the sentenced person’s place of residence.¹²²

XIII. PRISON CONDITIONS

Despite the use of new repressive tactics that do not necessarily culminate in imprisonment, the Cuban government continues to maintain a high number of political prisoners. In July 1996, human rights monitoring groups in Cuba presented the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba with a list of 1,173 persons serving sentences for political offenses.¹²³ Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz, head of the *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional* (CCDHRN), Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, one of the oldest and most respected rights groups in Cuba, recently estimated that there were between 3,000 and 5,000 persons currently imprisoned for political reasons, although many may have been charged with non-political crimes.¹²⁴

By the criteria of Amnesty International, as of 1996 there were some 600 “prisoners of conscience,” the term the organization uses for those imprisoned for reasons related to their attempts to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.¹²⁵ But even Amnesty International’s lower figure is enough to impress Cubans that no matter what image the Cuban government is trying to project abroad, no one is exempt from the threat of imprisonment for exercising internationally recognized political and civil rights.

¹²¹ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 2.

¹²² UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 20.

¹²³ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 10.

¹²⁴ Summa, Giancarlo. “An Interview with Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz,” *L’Unita* (Rome: 22 January 1997), p. 16. Pax Christi Netherlands, *Advice of Pax Christi Netherlands Regarding the Visit of the Holy Father to Cuba, January 1998* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: July 1997), p. 2.

¹²⁵ Amnesty International. “Cuba,” *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: 1997), p. 133.

The threat of imprisonment weighs heavily on the mind of any Cuban who would consider expressing or peacefully acting upon beliefs counter to the state. According to the most recent report on Cuba by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS), there are 294 prisons and correctional work camps located throughout Cuba, with an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 prisoners of all categories, who endure “deliberately severe and degrading treatment.”¹²⁶ According to the most recent report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba, conditions in Cuba’s prisons are characterized by:

...overcrowding, terrible sanitary conditions, inadequate and substandard food, limited medical care, beatings, restrictions on family visits, the problems of having common criminals share living quarters with political prisoners and the jailing of many political prisoners far from their home towns, which makes contact with their families extremely difficult.¹²⁷

In 1997 Amnesty International noted “frequent reports” of beatings in prisons, “sometimes with blunt instruments such as lengths of hosepipe.” It noted further that

...there were frequent indications that food and medical attention were withheld as a form of punishment. Prisoners who protested about their treatment or refused to obey prison rules were kept in punishment cells, sometimes with no light or furniture, for weeks or months at a time, often on reduced rations and without access to medical attention.¹²⁸

According to Pax Christi Netherlands:

The inhuman conditions in Cuban jails (psychological and physical torture combined with totally inadequate food and medicine supply) regularly result in fatalities.¹²⁹

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported in 1997, with regard to sentenced prisoners as well as those held in short-term detention,

...that beatings, far from constituting isolated incidents, are used habitually and systematically by Cuban state agents as a means of punishment or intimidation.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 699.

¹²⁷ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 9.

¹²⁸ Amnesty International. “Cuba,” *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: 1997), p. 134.

¹²⁹ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Advice of Pax Christi Netherlands Regarding the Visit of the Holy Father to Cuba, January 1998* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: July 1997), p. 2.

The Commission also reported that political prisoners are singled out for particularly harsh treatment, citing testimony by political prisoners in La Manga prison, Granma province, provided by a human rights monitoring group in Cuba, excerpts of which follow:

They place us with highly dangerous criminals, persons who have personality disorders, even psychiatric disorders. In many cases State Security...uses them to commit outrages on our dignity. Many are used by State Security as informants; they are promised benefits in exchange for providing information on what we say, and they are authorized to beat us if we speak poorly of the President of the Republic. Furthermore, the prison authorities have created a system in which certain prisoners are charged with overseeing the discipline of others in exchange for certain privileges. They are violent, unscrupulous and highly dangerous persons who impose excessive rigor. The slightest breach of discipline committed by a prisoner is met with outrages, denigrating words and even savage beatings...We are taken to severe interrogations based on false information given by the common prisoners, in addition to which we are threatened with death.¹³¹

Singling out political prisoners for especially harsh treatment conforms to a consistent pattern. In 1995, Human Rights Watch/Americas reported:

Conditions are often worse for political prisoners, who may be singled out for abuse. To begin with, political prisoners are kept together with common criminals—often criminals convicted of violent offenses or those with psychological problems—exposing them to a serious risk of harm. They also report harassment from prison authorities for their political beliefs, and continued efforts to “reeducate” them. Many political prisoners are allowed family visits only once every two months...A number of political prisoners have reportedly suffered from severe medical problems that were not properly treated.¹³²

XIV. THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT 1997

During the crackdown of 1996, *Concilio Cubano* leaders vowed to continue organizing toward a public assembly. By fall of that year, however, the umbrella organization was in disarray, with several of its top people in jail or forced into exile.

¹³⁰ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 704.

¹³¹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), p. 702.

¹³² Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p 26.

Manuel Cuesta Morua of the *Corriente Socialista Democrática*, Social Democratic Current, said in November, “We’re still regrouping.” But he and other *Concilio Cubano* representatives said the Cuban government continued to confiscate computers and fax machines, cut telephone lines, seize documents and prevent dissidents from attending meetings.¹³³

The last official membership list of the *Concilio Cubano* was issued in August 1996, and the number of members had been reduced to about 80 groups. The list was distributed abroad and appears in Appendix III of this report. By that time, however, there were divisions among the top figures in the organization over, among other things, whether to name *Concilio Cubano* representatives outside of Cuba.

A number of those who opposed that idea formed in August 1996 the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Análisis de la Situación Socio-Económica Cubana*, Internal Dissidence Work Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation, to reassess the political landscape for future dissident actions. The four founding members of the group, all previously members of the *Concilio Cubano* Support Group, or Group of Seven (see Appendix II), were: Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, a member of the executive committee of the *Partido Social Demócrata Cubana* (PSDC), Cuban Social Democratic Party; Félix Bonne Carcasés of the *Corriente Cívica Cubana*, Cuban Civic Current; Dr. René Gómez Manzano, a founder of the *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, Cuba’s principal independent lawyers’ group; and Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, director of the *Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes*, Cuban Institute of Independent Economists. During the remainder of 1996 and into early 1997, the Internal Dissidence Work Group kept a relatively low profile as it continued its work.

At the end of 1996, Cuban dissidents were encouraged by the decision of the 15-member European Union (EU) to adopt a policy toward Cuba that would “encourage a process of transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights.” The policy linked the prospect of an EU-Cuba cooperation pact, much desired by the Cuban government, to Cuba’s response to the EU’s call to release political prisoners and stop harassment of dissidents. Cuban dissidents hoped the new EU policy would give them greater prominence and legitimacy in international circles and undercut the Cuban government’s allegation that dissidents were pawns of the United States.¹³⁴

¹³³ Fainaru, Steve. “Nine Months Later, Cuba Dissidents in Disarray,” *Boston Globe* (Boston: 12 November 1996).

¹³⁴ Tamayo, Juan O. “Europeans Get Tough in Policy on Cuba,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 3 December 1996).

Dissidents were also encouraged when Canada's foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy, visited Cuba on January 21, 1997, and obtained an agreement from the Cuban government that discussion of human rights would be part of bilateral relations between Canada and Cuba. Despite the agreement, the Cuban government exhibited its continuing contempt for the issue of human rights by detaining for interrogation on the very same day the Canadian foreign minister was in Cuba: Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello of the Internal Dissidence Working Group; and Tania Quintero and Juan Antonio Sánchez, reporters for the independent news agency *CubaPress*.¹³⁵

On April 15, 1997, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) announced that it would hold its fifth party congress in the fall. The date was subsequently set for October 8-10, 1997. In response to that announcement, and to a State Security sweep against dissidents and independent trade unionists on May 1, 1997,¹³⁶ the Internal Dissidence Work Group held a press conference for the foreign media in the Havana home of Vladimiro Roca on May 5, 1997.

The participants at the press conference were: Roca and the three other founders of the group, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, René Gómez Manzano and Félix Bonne Carcasés; Odilia Collazo Valdés, head of the Working Group's eight-member *Comité de Apoyo*, Support Committee, and representative of the *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* (PPDHC), Party for Human Rights in Cuba; Jesús Yanez Pelletier, member of the executive committee of the *Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos* (CCPDH), Cuban Committee for Human Rights, headed by Gustavo Arcos Bergnes; and Arnaldo Ramos Lauzirique and Rafael García Suárez of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba*, Cuban Confederation of Democratic Workers. Twenty-one foreign journalists, representing media outlets from ten countries, attended.¹³⁷

The eight organizations which formed the Work Group Support Committee were:¹³⁸

- *Alianza Patriótica Cubana* - Cuban Patriotic Alliance.

¹³⁵ Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 22 January 1997).

¹³⁶ Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 20 May 1997).

¹³⁷ Tamayo, Juan O. "Dissidents Ask Cubans to Boycott Elections," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 6 May 1997). Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 5 May 1997). *EFE Spanish News Agency. Conferencia de Prensa del Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna* (5 May 1997) - excerpts from the transcript of the press conference as reported on the *CubaNet* web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹³⁸ *EFE Spanish News Agency. Conferencia de Prensa del Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna* (5 May 1997) - excerpts from the transcript of the press conference as reported on the *CubaNet* web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

- *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba* - Confederation of Democratic Workers of Cuba.
- *Jóvenes Defensores de los Derechos Humanos* - Youth Defenders of Human Rights.
- *Movimiento 13 de Julio* - July 13th Movement.
- *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* - Party for Human Rights in Cuba.
- *Sociedad Internacional Pro Libertad del Sector Médico de Cuba* - International Society for Liberty of the Medical Sector of Cuba.
- *Unión de Jóvenes Democráticos de Cuba de la provincia de Piñar del Río* - Union of Democratic Youths of Cuba from the province of Piñar del Río.
- *Unión Democrática Cubana* - Cuban Democratic Union.

By early July 1997, as reported by Miami-based newspaper columnist Ileana Fuentes, a number of other organizations had signed on to the Support Committee of the Working Group, including:¹³⁹

- *Alerta Verde Grupo Ecológico* - Green Alert Ecological Group.
- *Alianza Juvenil Martiana* - Martí Youth Alliance.
- *Foro de Estudios Históricos* - Historical Studies Forum.
- *Madres por la Libertad* - Mothers for Liberty.
- *Movimiento Agenda Nacionalista* - Nationalist Agenda Movement.
- *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia* - Cuban Movement of Youths for Democracy.
- *Movimiento Liberal Democrático* - Democratic Liberal Movement.
- *Movimiento Pacifista por la Democracia* - Pacifist Movement for Democracy.
- *Movimiento Unión Nacional Cubano* - Cuban National Union Movement.
- *Partido Liberal Democrático de Cuba* - Democratic Liberal Party of Cuba.
- *Partido Unión Democrática Cubana* - Cuban Democratic Union Party.
- *Unión Humanitaria de Cristianos Sociales* - Humanitarian Union of Social Christians.

At the May 5, 1997 press conference, the Work Group issued a six-point platform in support of a transition to democracy in Cuba and proposed the convening of an international forum with the participation of the European Union to discuss the issue. Further, it called for negotiations between the Cuban government and the internal and external opposition to address “a grave, general, economic, political, social and moral

¹³⁹ Fuentes, Ileana. “Habla la disidencia cubana,” *El Diario/La Prensa* (New York: 20 July 1997).

crisis the country is facing.” It also called for Cubans to boycott the PCC-controlled elections for the National Assembly expected sometime after the fifth PCC congress in October.¹⁴⁰

On May 23, 1997, the PCC released a party platform in preparation for the October 8-10 PCC congress. The document’s title, “The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights that We Defend,” seemed designed to appease international criticism, but the document itself staunchly, and in grim language, defended the one-party Communist system. The platform hailed the PCC ideology based on “Marx, Engels and Lenin,” excoriated Cubans’ “fascination and frivolous cult for Yankee symbols and models,” and called on PCC members to respond “firmly” to “counterrevolutionaries” and “criminals” seeking to undermine the regime. On the subject of human rights, the platform stated there were no human rights violations in Cuba, that “there has not been a single political crime, one person tortured, one person disappeared since 1959.”¹⁴¹

On June 7, 1997, the Work Group met in Havana with Michael Ranneberger, the U.S. State Department coordinator on Cuba, and asked the United States to act as an observer of the National Assembly elections. Vladimiro Roca reiterated the group’s call for Cubans to boycott the elections, saying, “[a]bstentionism is the only way to turn this voting into an election, to show the government we do not agree with the system it has imposed.”¹⁴²

On June 27, 1997, the Work Group issued a paper entitled, “The Homeland Belongs to Us All,” in response to the PCC party platform. In the paper the group stated that the PCC platform “does not offer the possibility of establishing a true constitutional state, nor an independent and impartial legal system that would protect the liberties and rights of the individual and the practice of political pluralism.” Following a detailed diagnosis of Cuba’s ongoing economic crisis, the group repeated its earlier call for negotiations between all Cubans on the island and abroad, saying, “[i]t is better to discuss solutions now than to plunge our homeland into mourning tomorrow.”¹⁴³ The Work Group and its Support Committee claimed to represent between 500 and 1,000 dissidents.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Tamayo, Juan O. “Dissidents Ask Cubans to Boycott Elections,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 6 May 1997). Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 5 May 1997). *EFE Spanish News Agency. Conferencia de Prensa del Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna* (5 May 1997) - excerpts from the transcript of the press conference as reported on the *CubaNet* web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁴¹ Tamayo, Juan O. “Cuba Chills Talk of Change,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 26 May 1997).

¹⁴² *Agence France Presse* (Paris: 7 June 1997).

¹⁴³ The document can be found on the *CubaNet* web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁴⁴ *Agence France Presse* (Paris: 27 June 1997).

Five days earlier, on June 22, 1997, another group of former *Concilio Cubano* members formed the *Alianza Nacional Cubana*, Cuban National Alliance. Principal organizers included *Concilio Cubano* national delegate Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro, who had been released from prison on May 9, 1997, and his wife, Zoírís Aguilar Calleja, president of the *Alianza Democrática Popular* (ADEPO2), Popular Democratic Alliance. The independent news agency *Habana Press*, Havana Press, reported that the Cuban National Alliance, at the time of its founding, consisted of the following member organizations:¹⁴⁵

- *Alianza Democrática Popular* - Popular Democratic Alliance.
- *Coalición Democrática Cubana* - Cuban Democratic Coalition.
- *Comité por Paz, Progreso y Libertad* - Committee for Peace, Progress and Liberty.
- *Movimiento de Madres por la Solidaridad* - Movement of Mothers for Solidarity.
- *NaturPaz* - NaturePeace.
- *Organización Femenina Independiente* - Independent Women's Organization.
- *Organización Juvenil Martiana por la Democracia* - Martí Youth Organization for Democracy.
- *Partido Acción Nacionalista*- National Action Party.
- *Partido Liberal Democrático* - Liberal Democratic Party.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Cuba* - Union of Workers of Cuba.

The Cuban National Alliance called for renewed efforts to reconstitute the *Concilio Cubano* based on its original principles, and called on the Cuban government to allow the *Concilio Cubano* to hold the meeting which had been prohibited in February 1996. The Alliance also called upon the Cuban government to hold a plebiscite in which Cubans would vote to amend the constitution in favor of “freedom of expression, freedom of association, pluralism, and the election of rulers through direct, free and secret ballots within the framework of representative democracy.”¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, it was reported that the *Concilio Cubano* commission for the province of Havana, Commission No. 7, met in the city of Artemisa on June 29, 1997. It called for

¹⁴⁵ *Habana Press* dispatch published on 22 July 1997 on the CubaNet web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>. It should be noted that while Cuba's independent news agencies operate in a professional manner despite the conditions they must endure, as was noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba in his 1997 report, dispatches do not always transmit exactly the official names of organizations.

¹⁴⁶ Marquis, Christopher. “Cuban Rights Activist Petitions Castro to Allow Dissident Group to Meet,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 26 June 1997). *Habana Press* dispatch published on 22 July 1997 on the CubaNet web site: <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

a revitalization of the umbrella group's national structure. The following organizations were represented:¹⁴⁷

- *Asociación de Campesinos Independientes* - Independent Peasants Association.
- *Asociación de Maestros y Profesores* - Association of Teachers and Professors.
- *Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia* - National Association of Self-Employed Workers.
- *Centro No Gubernamental de Derechos Humanos y Cultura de Paz "José de la Luz y Caballero"* - Non-Governmental Human Rights, Culture and Peace Center "José de la Luz y Caballero."
- *Consejo Unitarios Cubanos, Delegación Artemiseña* - Council of Cuban Unitarians, Artemisa Delegation.
- *Fundación Regional de Opositores de Artemisa* - Regional Opposition Foundation of Artemisa.
- *Partido Demócrata Cristiano, Delegación Artemiseña* - Christian Democrat Party, Artemisa Delegation.
- *Unión Demócrata Cristiana* - Christian Democratic Union.

XV. THE 1997 CRACKDOWN

Although the Cuban government had not disrupted the May 5, 1997 press conference of the Internal Dissidence Work Group, repression against dissidents generally had been on the increase since the beginning of the year, and would culminate in a crackdown against the Work Group itself in July.

Héctor Palacio Ruíz, one of the four *Concilio Cubano* vice national delegates and president of the *Partido Solidaridad Democrático* (PSD), Democratic Solidarity Party, was arrested on January 9, 1997, after saying during an interview with German television, "Either Fidel Castro is crazy and wants to submit this country to a holocaust, or he is simply trying to prolong his stay in power."¹⁴⁸ Palacio Ruíz was held for nine months, convicted in a two-hour trial on September 4, 1997, on the charge of *desacato*, "disrespect," and sentenced to 18 months in prison. According to Amnesty International,

¹⁴⁷ "Se Reúne Comisión de Concilio Cubano," *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Cuba: 29 June 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Newman, Lucia. *CNN* (Havana: 10 June 1997) - as reported on 10 June 1997 on the *CNN Interactive* web site: <http://cnn.com/index.html>.

friends and journalists were not allowed to attend the trial and the witnesses his lawyer had requested were not permitted to testify.¹⁴⁹

On May 1, 1997, at least a dozen dissidents were arrested. Most were interrogated by State Security, threatened with imprisonment if they did not cease their “illegal” activities, and released. Ana María Agramonte Crespo of the *Movimiento Acción Nacionalista*, Nationalist Action Movement, however, who had been dragged out of her home by police on May 1, was tried and convicted on May 20 on a charge of “disrespect” and sentenced to 18 months in the Havana Women’s Prison, known as *Manto Negro*, Black Mantle.¹⁵⁰ As of June 26, 1997, Alberto Perera Martínez of the *Comité por Paz, Progreso y Libertad*, Committee for Peace, Progress and Liberty, was still being held at the Villa Marista State Security headquarters in Havana.¹⁵¹

Also detained on May 1, 1997, was Reinaldo Alfaro García of the *Asociación de Lucha Frente a la Injusticia* (ALFIN), Association for Struggle Against Injustice. Alfaro García is also a member of the executive of the *Partido Solidaridad Democrático* (PSD), Democratic Solidarity Party. He was released and re-arrested on May 8. On July 13, he was transferred to the *Combinado del Este* prison where, as of August 20, he was still awaiting trial on charges of “enemy propaganda” and “spreading false news against international peace.” His arrest reportedly came the day after he had delivered a letter, together with several mothers of political prisoners, to the President of the National Assembly, asking for an amnesty.¹⁵²

During the first six months of 1997, according to Cuban human rights activists, “dozens and dozens” of dissidents and independent journalists had been subject to short-term detention by police and State Security, and harassment and intimidation by SUVP groups and Rapid Response Brigades. Some were threatened with imprisonment if they did not stop their activities, while others, usually more prominent figures, were threatened with imprisonment if they did not leave the country. Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz told CNN in June 1997, “Last year the human rights situation was worse than in 1995, and

¹⁴⁹ Amnesty International. *Further information on EXTRA 117/97 issued 28 August 1997, Prisoner of Conscience/Legal Concern* (Nederland, CO: 5 September 1997). Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 4 September 1997).

¹⁵⁰ Newman, Lucia. *CNN* (Havana: 10 June 1997) - as reported on the *CNN Interactive* web site, 10 June 1997. *EFE* Spanish news agency (Havana: 20 May 1997).

¹⁵¹ Amnesty International. *Urgent Action Follow Up* (Nederland, CO: 26 June 1997).

¹⁵² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 6.

this year unfortunately the situation is already worse than last year.”¹⁵³ Amnesty International supported the assessment of the Cuban rights monitors, stating in mid-1997 that since 1996,

...members of Concilio Cubano and journalists working for independent organizations have been subjected to persistent harassment and frequent short-term detention. They have also been threatened with long-term imprisonment and occasionally physical violence if they do not cease their activities or leave the country.¹⁵⁴

The targeting of the Internal Dissidence Work Group and its Support Committee began in the first days of July 1997. On July 2, Odilia Collazo Valdés, head of the Work Group Support Committee was detained and released by State Security, and two colleagues of Work Group co-founder Marta Beatriz Roque had their homes searched by State Security agents who confiscated a computer. Collazo Valdés, who is also president of the *Madres por la Democracia*, Mothers for Democracy, was among some 40 members of groups belonging to the Support Committee who were detained around that date, interrogated, and released.¹⁵⁵ The night of July 2, unidentified individuals threw rocks and shattered windows at the home of Vladimiro Roca, and on July 3, Roca’s wife was temporarily detained for interrogation by State Security officials.¹⁵⁶

On July 16, all four founding members of the Work Group were arrested and taken to the Villa Marista State Security headquarters in Havana: Vladimiro Roca Antuñuz, Marta Beatriz Roque, Dr. René Gómez Manzano, and Félix Bonne Carcasés. Each of their homes was searched and items ranging from books, computers, printers and cameras, to pencils, pens, envelopes and English-language training manuals were confiscated.¹⁵⁷ Cuban Foreign Ministry official Miguel Alfonso said the four were arrested “for charges related to counterrevolutionary activities.”¹⁵⁸ On July 17, Odilia Collazo Valdés was re-arrested and this time taken to State Security headquarters, where

¹⁵³ Newman, Lucia. *CNN* (Havana: 10 June 1997). Transcript published on the *CNN Interactive* web site, 10 June 1997. *EFE* Spanish news agency (Havana: 20 May 1997, 26 February 1997 and 2 April 1997).

¹⁵⁴ Amnesty International. *Arbitrary Arrest/Legal Concern/Prisoner of Conscience* (Nederland, CO: UA 221/97, 18 July 1997), 1 p.

¹⁵⁵ Amnesty International. *Further Information on UA 221/97 issued 18 July 1997, Arbitrary arrest/Legal concern/Prisoner of conscience (POC)* (Nederland, CO: 22 July 1997), 1 p..

¹⁵⁶ Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 3 July 1997).

¹⁵⁷ Amnesty International. *Further Information on UA 221/97 issued 18 July 1997, Arbitrary arrest/Legal concern/Prisoner of conscience (POC)* (Nederland, CO: 22 July 1997), 1 p.. *EFE*, Spanish news agency (Havana: 17 July 1997).

¹⁵⁸ *Associated Press* (New York: 17 July 1997).

she was held for three days and released.¹⁵⁹ The four Work Group members were declared “prisoners of conscience” by Amnesty International.¹⁶⁰

A week after the arrests of the four Work Group members, the Cuban government hinted that it would attempt to link the four to the series of small, unclaimed bomb explosions at Cuban tourist hotels since April.¹⁶¹ In response to inquiries by the Dutch and Canadian embassies regarding the arrests, the Cuban government sent a diplomatic note which stated, “[t]he Cuban authorities have sufficient proof of the involvement of these citizens with leaders of terrorist groups in the territory of the United States.” The note also said the four were being held for “subverting the legal and constitutional order of the Republic of Cuba,” and because they had lied about the economy and had threatened foreign investors, the latter allegation apparently in reference to a letter the Work Group had sent to European firms in Cuba in February, asking them to respect worker rights.¹⁶²

As of mid-September 1997, the four Work Group members remained in detention at State Security Headquarters in Havana, without any formal charges having been brought against them. Odilia Collazo was arrested again on August 7, threatened with imprisonment and released. On August 23, she and her husband were injured in a traffic accident, in which they say a Havana city bus deliberately veered into the path of their automobile.¹⁶³

Cuban rights monitors said that during the four weeks that began with the targeting of the Work Group, 85 dissidents and independent journalists were arrested, most for short-term detentions during which they were threatened with long-term imprisonment. It was the second largest security sweep this decade after the crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano* in 1996. Many of those detained were threatened with 20-year prison sentences on charges of “terrorism” and “sabotage.” The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists counted nine independent journalists detained between June 23 and the first week in August. Most were subsequently released after being threatened with imprisonment, but Lorenzo Paez Núñez was tried and convicted of “disrespect” against the national police and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Paez

¹⁵⁹ Amnesty International. *Further Information on UA 221/97 issued 18 July 1997, Arbitrary arrest/Legal concern/Prisoner of conscience (POC)* (Nederland, CO: 22 July 1997), 1 p..

¹⁶⁰ Amnesty International. *Further Information on UA 221/97 issued 18 July 1997, Arbitrary arrest/Legal concern/Prisoner of conscience (POC)* (Nederland, CO: 22 July 1997), 1 p..

¹⁶¹ Balmaseda, Liz. “Havana’s Buzzing About Hotel Bombings,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 15 July 1997).

¹⁶² Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 24 July 1997). Correa, Armando. “Cuba Again Cracks Down on Opposition,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 24 July 1997).

¹⁶³ Baguer, Néstor. *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba, APIC* (Havana: 25 August 1997).

Núñez is the head of *Libertad*², Freedom, an independent news agency based in the province of Havana which is affiliated with the BPIC, a correspondent for the more recently formed *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (ANP), New Press Agency, and president of the *Centro No Gubernamental para los Derechos Humanos “José de la Luz y Caballero,”* José de la Luz y Caballero Non-Governmental Center for Human Rights.¹⁶⁴

According to Amnesty International, from April to August 20, 1997, there were 150 detentions of members of dissident organizations and independent journalists, “who have been attempting to peacefully challenge official positions in many different spheres, including politics and human rights.” Amnesty stated that because of the severe limitations on the reporting of human rights violations, “the real figure may well be higher.” Amnesty reported that of those detained during this period, eight people were brought to trial and sentenced to prison and 28 others were believed to be facing trial. While some were charged with offenses of an overtly political nature, others were charged with offenses which were “believed to have been fabricated or unfairly brought against them as punishment for their political views.” Amnesty further reported that many other activists were threatened with imprisonment if they did not forego their activities or leave the country. Amnesty noted that in some cases, the activists were subjected to physical attacks by persons believed to be working for State Security, anonymous telephone threats, loss of employment or threats against members of their families. Others were subjected to *actos de repudio*, acts of repudiation, had their telephone lines cut, or were ordered by police not to leave their homes for a certain period of time. Finally, Amnesty reported the confiscation from activists of office equipment such as typewriters, computers and fax machines, as well as books and documents, including reports of alleged human rights violations and copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁶⁵

The crackdown continued through August and on into September. On August 19, Zoírís Aguilar Calleja, wife of Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro and a co-founder with him of the Cuban National Alliance, was arrested along with Maritza Lugo Fernández of the *Partido Democrático “30 de Noviembre” Frank País*, Democratic Party “30th of November” Frank País. Aguilar Calleja was released on September 1. On September 7, 1997, Lugo Fernández was sentenced to two years in prison on a charge of “bribery,”

¹⁶⁴ Tamayo, Juan O. “Top Journalist Arrested as Cuba Expands Sweep,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 3 August 1997). Amnesty International. *Cuba: Prisoners of Conscience: Lorenzo Paez Nunez and Dagoberto Vega Jaime* (London: AMR 25/25/97, 7 August 1997), 3 p.

¹⁶⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 1. See also Tables A-E in the Appendix for the lists of those detained.

after the government accused her of paying 100 pesos to a prison official to smuggle a tape recorder to a political prisoner, Ayarde Herrera, held in a Havana jail. Lugo Fernández is the wife of Rafael Ibarra López, president of the Democratic Party “30th of November” Frank País, who is currently serving a twenty-year sentence for “sabotage.” A number of other dissidents associated with the National Alliance were also detained, threatened with imprisonment and released.¹⁶⁶

The 1997 crackdown extended beyond Havana, targeting dissident organizations that have been able to maintain branches in other provinces, as well as groups that are regionally based and often not as well known by foreign journalists based in Havana. Repression against local groups in the provinces can be more difficult to track because of difficulties in communication and travel, and because the foreign press corps tends to focus more on events in Havana. Nonetheless, Cuba’s independent news agencies have managed to place correspondents in a majority of the fourteen provinces outside Havana and some agencies themselves are based outside the capital. That has resulted in the last few years in a better flow of information from other parts of the island. The following incidents are just a few examples of regional reports based on the dispatches of Cuban independent journalists. Although the reporting of Cuba’s independent journalists is at times uneven—not surprising, given the arduous conditions under which they must operate—most make great efforts to be accurate. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba stated in his most recent report that Cuba’s independent news agencies “maintain high professional standards,”¹⁶⁷ and in 1996 they were awarded the Grand Prize for Press Freedom by the Inter-American Press Association, which is made up of editors and publishers of news media in Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States.

On May 3, 1997, as reported by the *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (BPIC), Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba, Zoilo Rafael Gavilla Valdés was interrogated by State Security in the western city of Piñar del Rio. Gavilla Valdés had fought with anti-government guerrillas in the central Escambray region in the 1960s, served a prison term and was later released. State Security questioned him about involvement with an organization called *Veteranos Independientes*, Independent

¹⁶⁶ EFE Spanish news agency (Havana: 1 September 1997). “Líder opositora será juzgada por tribunal militar,” *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami: 5 September 1997). “Condenada a dos años de privación de libertad la opositora Maritza Lugo Fernández,” *Habana Press* (Havana: 7 September 1997) - as reported on *Cubanet* at <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁶⁷ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 8.

Veterans, a group of former anti-government fighters still living in Cuba. Gavilla Valdés denied involvement with that group, but admitted belonging to a former prisoners club, *Ex Club Cautivo*, Club of Ex-Captives. State Security threatened him with imprisonment if he did not cease his activities with the club.¹⁶⁸ *The Ex Club Cautivo* was formed in January 1996 in the town of San Carlos in the province of Piñar del Río. As of January 1997, the president was Luis Alberto Rodríguez, who stated at that time that in 1996 many of the clubs members had been detained by State Security and threatened with imprisonment.¹⁶⁹

On April 4, 1997, as reported by the *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba* (APIC), Independent Press Agency of Cuba, the group called *Movimiento Juvenil Ortodoxo del Año 2000*, Movement of Orthodox Youth of the Year 2000, witnessed police sweeps of young people in front of the Hotel Santiago in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba. APIC also reported that on April 9, 1997, in Santiago de Cuba, María Victoria Altunaga Benítez, a member of the *Movimiento Democracia y Paz Oriente*, Democracy and Peace Movement of the East, and a member as well of the *Club de Ex-Presos Políticos Gerardo González*, Club of Ex-Political Prisoners Gerardo González, was detained for five hours by State Security and threatened with physical assault and imprisonment. Also on April 9, 1997, as reported by the APIC, Orestes Rodríguez Orruitiner, president of the *Comité de Amigos del Club de Ex-Presos Políticos*, Committee of Friends of the Club of Ex-Political Prisoners, was summoned to the State Security office in Santiago de Cuba, where he was threatened with imprisonment if he did not cease his involvement in “little counterrevolutionary groups.”¹⁷⁰ Independent news agency *Habana Press*, Havana Press, subsequently reported that Rodríguez Orruitiner, who is also vice-president of the *Movimiento Pro Derechos Humanos Seguidores de Chibás*, Movement for Human Rights Followers of Chibás, in Santiago de Cuba, was arrested on June 20, 1997, and held for 72 hours by State Security in Santiago de Cuba.¹⁷¹

The crackdown against dissidents continued in October 1997, with a wave of arrests in the city of Santa Clara in north-central Villa Clara Province that began on

¹⁶⁸ “Amenazan a exguerrilleros del Escambray,” *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (5 May 1997) - as reported on “Breaking News-May 1997,” *CubaNet*, at <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁶⁹ “El Ex Club Cautivo Cumplió su primer aniversario,” *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (30 January 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 3 February 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁷⁰ “Represión masiva contra jóvenes in Santiago de Cuba,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC - as reported on “News from Santiago,” 16 April 1997, *CubaNet* “April” archives - <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁷¹ “Arrestos, detenciones contra disidentes in Santiago,” *Habana Press* (Havana: 1 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, “July” archives, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

October 9 according to Amnesty International. Amnesty reported that 12 individuals associated with the *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* (PPDHC), Party for Human Rights in Cuba, were arrested for carrying out a hunger strike to protest the previous arrest of Daula Carpio Mata, the PPDHC provincial delegate for Villa Clara. Carpio Mata had been placed in the Guamajal Women’s Prison to await trial on charges of intimidating a prison doctor. A two-year prison sentence was being sought. On October 16, 1997, Ricardo González Alfonso, a *CubaPress* correspondent covering the incidents in Santa Clara, was arrested at his home in Havana and threatened with long-term imprisonment.¹⁷² The arrest of González Alfonso was carried out by State Security agents under the command of an official who identified himself as “Aramis,” according to *CubaPress* director Raúl Rivero Castañeda, who was present at the time. Cuba’s independent news agencies report that “Aramis” frequently is in charge of State Security operations against independent journalists.¹⁷³

In October 1997, the APIC reported on detentions, interrogations and other forms of intimidation against dissident groups in eastern Cuba. Groups targeted included the *Comité Pro Derechos Humanos Oriental*, Eastern Committee for Human Rights, based in the city of Bayamo, José Angel Correa, Luis Felipe Rodríguez and Ana Luisa León Arana, officers; the *Unión Cristiana de Cuba*, Christian Union of Cuba, based in the city of Bayamo, Ricardo Aramis, President; and the *Movimiento de Derechos Humanos*, Movement of Human Rights, based in Guacanayabo, Luz Delia Aguilar, Vice-President.¹⁷⁴

XVI. ASSESSMENT OF GROUPS

As described in chapters II-VII of this report, Cuba is a one-party Communist state, in which every Cuban is subject to a totalitarian system of political and social control. That system is institutionalized and given legal framework by the 1976 Constitution and the Penal Code, which together outlaw virtually any form of political or civic activity outside the purview of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Anyone deemed by the regime to be in opposition to it is considered a “counterrevolutionary” and an “enemy,” and is therefore at risk of punishment. The judicial system, constitutionally

¹⁷² Amnesty International. *Prisoners of Conscience/Possible POCs/Legal Concern* (Nederland, CO: EXTRA 139/97, 17 October 1997), 1 p.

¹⁷³ “Independent Journalist is Arrested in Cuba,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 19 October 1997)

¹⁷⁴ *Boletín de la Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (15 October 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 17 October 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

subordinated to the executive and legislative branches and under the control of the PCC, leaves Cubans with no recourse before the unlimited powers of the state.

Cubans know there is a line, not always easily discernible, which cannot be crossed without incurring some type of repressive reaction from the state. Whether or not they are identified with an “illegal” organization, individuals who harbor critical opinions about the nature of rule in Cuba risk punishment merely by expressing their views, either publicly or privately. The regime at times allows a certain level of complaining, usually during periods of economic crisis—for example, complaints about deficient public transportation, electricity blackouts, or the quality of produce at state-run food outlets. However, criticism of the political system itself or its leadership is not tolerated.

Moreover, an individual who expresses such criticism knows not only that he or she is subject to punishment, but that relatives and friends can also come under suspicion or be similarly threatened by the state as a way to intimidate the actual dissenter. The same goes for relatives or friends of people who actually do belong to groups considered “illegal” by the state. For example, it was reported in July 1997 that during a series of State Security interrogations of four members of the *Partido Democrático “30 de Noviembre” Frank País* in Manzanillo, Granma province, Virginia Estrada, the 68-year-old mother of one of the party members was herself ordered to the State Security office for questioning. The son, Luis Mario Parés Estrada, stated, “[s]he’s not a political activist and they know it. They’ve ordered her in to scare her and to discourage me from continuing with this struggle for human rights.”¹⁷⁵ In the assessment of Pax Christi Netherlands:

State Security keeps a careful watch on activists, threatening them and their families: “We will fire your brother,” “We’ll send you to the other end of the country,” “Something is going to happen to your family,” “We are going to arrest you.” To intimidate activists, they are telephoned every two hours during the night, members of their families are held for questioning, their homes are prey to vandalism and slogans are painted on their walls.¹⁷⁶

In another example, Julio Restano Suárez, the 75-year-old father of Yndamiro Restano, the founder of the independent *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba*

¹⁷⁵ “Ofensiva Contra Activistas en provincia de Granma,” *CubaPress* dispatch published in *Diario Las Americas* (Miami: 10 July 1997).

¹⁷⁶ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 13. Pax Christi Netherlands is a self-described “progressive” human rights group of the Roman Catholic Church with offices in 25 nations. The group is known in Latin America for its investigations and denunciations of human rights violations by right-wing and military governments in Latin America in the 1980s. The group publicly opposes the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba.

(BPIC), the Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba, was interrogated for ten hours at the Villa Marista State Security headquarters in Havana on May 2, 1996. He was warned not to allow further BPIC meetings at his home, where the BPIC office was based.¹⁷⁷

Penalties for criticism of the political system or its leaders can range from job loss to imprisonment, but the initial stage of punishment can begin with intimidating visits or other warnings from State Security, the national police, or members of PCC-controlled mass organizations such as the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDRs), Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

Targeted individuals also may receive written citations or warnings from State Security or the police regarding their conduct or statements they have made. For example, Antonio Morales Torres, a member of the *Bloque Democrático “José Martí,”* José Martí Democratic Bloc, in Nueva Gerona, the principal city on the *Isla de Juventud* (formerly *Isla de Pinos*), Isle of Youth, related to *CubaPress* in July 1997 that State Security had filed three warnings against him for “dangerousness” and that he had been told by officials that he could be formally charged with that crime at any time.¹⁷⁸

It should be emphasized, too, that while this report includes the names of dissident groups which are known, it is quite possible that there are groups or cells which operate clandestinely in order to avoid the punishment to which all groups known to the state are subjected. For instance, while in Cuba in 1995, this writer came to know in a south-central coastal city a small group of people, mostly teachers, who met at night in a public park. They gathered with the pretext of listening to taped jazz music, but used the meetings to compile instances of corruption and abuse in the schools, a dossier, they said, to be applied against local PCC officials in the event of a hoped-for political transition in Cuba. One teacher had already received a written citation from the local State Security office for certain statements made during a faculty meeting. But all would be subject to far greater penalties if the actual nature of their group were known. It is not out of the realm of possibility that similar dissident groupings might form and try to operate clandestinely within official institutions, but because State Security is so pervasive, it is questionable how long such groupings would be able to exist without detection.

Another point to be emphasized is that since at least 1993-1994, the Cuban government has blurred the line between political and common crimes, part of an effort to improve its image internationally, as described in Section IV. This is particularly the case

¹⁷⁷ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ “Activista Amenazado in Nueva Gerona,” *CubaPress* (11 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, “July” archives, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

in the government's use of the penal statutes against "dangerousness." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has concluded that because of "their lack of precision and their subjective nature," the legal definitions of "dangerousness"

constitute a source of juridical insecurity which creates conditions permitting the Cuban authorities to take arbitrary action.¹⁷⁹

In other words, the Penal Code articles which define "dangerousness" constitute a catch-all mechanism which gives the government the legal justification for taking any citizen it wants out of circulation. As Human Rights Watch/Americas has stated:

Cubans who engage in "anti-social behavior" or violate "socialist morality" may be held in preventive detention under the "dangerousness" provisions of the criminal code for as long as four years, even without being convicted of a crime.¹⁸⁰

According to Pax Christi Netherlands and Human Rights Watch/Americas, there are clear indications that the crime of "dangerousness" is used as a cover to imprison people for political reasons on the grounds that they are common delinquents.¹⁸¹

Finally, the reader who is looking for a reference to a specific group or individual should not limit the search solely to this chapter of the report on groups at risk. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight specific categories of groups of risk. Not all known groups are mentioned in this section and the reader is advised to see also the Index and the Appendices to this report.

A. Dissident Organizations

As described in Chapters IX, XI and XIV of this report, and as can be seen in the lists of *Concilio Cubano* members in Appendices I and III, dissident groups have proliferated in the 1990s despite repeated crackdowns against them. What began in the second half of the 1970s as a handful of human rights groups has grown into a diverse array that now includes independent youth and women's organizations, trade unionists, former political prisoners, lawyers' groups, medical associations, artists, environmentalists and farmers. Many affiliated themselves with the *Concilio Cubano*, which is described in detail in Chapter XI, while others remained independent even

¹⁷⁹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). "Cuba," *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 710.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 9.

¹⁸¹ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands, March 1996), p. 15. Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Stifling Dissent in the Midst of Crisis* (New York: February 1994), p. 5.

though they might have shared its principles. Many dissident groups have joined two new umbrella groups that have emerged in the wake of the 1996 crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano*: the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna*, Internal Dissidence Work Group, and the *Alianza Nacional Cubana*, Cuban National Alliance, both of which are described in detail in Chapter XIV, and were targeted in the 1997 crackdown.

All of these groups and umbrella organizations disavow violence and many have tried to gain legal status through the Law of Associations, Law 54 of December 27, 1985. The law was decreed at the beginning of the slight thaw in repression that occurred in 1985-1988. The law, which does not apply to PCC-controlled organizations or religious groups, establishes procedures by which certain kinds of associations can be established. Applications are reviewed and decided upon by the Ministry of Justice, and can be turned down for procedural reasons or because insufficient information is provided as well as “if its activities could damage the social interest” or if another association with similar aims or name already exists. If recognized, the association is subject to periodic inspections and must supply the state with information about its work. Only one dissident organization, the ecological groups *NaturPaz*, NaturePeace, headed by *Concilio Cubano* national delegate Leonel Morejón Almagro, has ever received a reply, and that was a denial, nearly ten years after the application had been submitted.¹⁸²

1. Youth Organizations

Since the 1996 crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano*, younger dissidents have been particularly active and have been targeted by the government for harsh penalties. For example, there are the cases of two young leaders who had emerged during the formation of the *Concilio Cubano* itself: the 31-year old Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro, a lawyer, and the 35-year-old Lázaro González Valdés. Aside from their duties on the National Secretariat, both were members of the *Concilio Cubano* youth commission, *Pinos Nuevos*, New Pines, and González Valdés was president of the *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos en Cuba* (PPDHC), Party for Human Rights in Cuba. In a three-hour trial on February 22, 1996, González Valdés was found guilty of “disrespect” and “disobedience” and sentenced to fourteen months in prison. His defense lawyer was only able to speak to him minutes before the trial began and the court building was surrounded by police and a Rapid Response Brigade armed with metal bars and sticks. The next day, Dr. Morejón was tried and convicted of “resistance.” He was sentenced to six months in

¹⁸² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96), April 1996), p. 1-2.

prison. When he appealed, he was given an additional nine-month prison sentence for “disrespect.”¹⁸³

Another member of New Pines, Luis Felipe Lores Nadal, was first imprisoned in 1993 on a charge of “dangerousness,” and released in March 1995. He was arrested again on February 24, 1996, and held for eight days. Upon his release he was told to discontinue his activities, leave the country, or face imprisonment again.¹⁸⁴

On June 6, 1996, in Havana, 32-year-old Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina and 27-year-old Radames García de la Vega, president and vice-president of the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy, were arrested, charged with “disrespect” and “resistance” and sentenced respectively to twelve and six months’ “restricted liberty” and “banishment,” or internal exile. The arrest was in connection to a project they had initiated, *Universidades Sin Fronteras*, Universities Without Borders, to demand that universities be made autonomous of the government, an old Latin American tradition. After being beaten while in police detention, Rodríguez Lobaina and García de la Vega were removed to their respective homes in Baracoa, Guantánamo province, and Palma de Soriano, in the province of Santiago de Cuba.¹⁸⁵

In January 1997, Rodríguez Lobaina, García de la Vega, and 29-year-old Heriberto Leyva Rodríguez, also a vice-president of the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, signed an open letter to Fidel Castro calling for academic freedom in Cuba’s universities and an end to professors and students being fired or thrown out of school because of their political beliefs, what they referred to as “ideological apartheid.” The letter also protested their previous arrests, death threats, beatings, trials without due process and internal exile. Rodríguez Lobaina was again arrested on April 8, 1997, and two days later sentenced to 18 months in prison in the *Combinado de Guantánamo* prison for “disrespect” and “resistance.” García de la Vega was arrested on April 30, 1997, charged with “disrespect,” and tried and sentenced on July 23, 1997, to 18 months at Santiago de Cuba prison. Days after the trial, Leyva Rodríguez was fined 1,000 pesos, the equivalent of nearly five months’ wages, for “disrespect of the Court” and “violating

¹⁸³ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 20-21. Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ LaFranchi, Howard. “Cuba’s Tough Line on Dissent: Don’t Trust Anyone Under 30,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston: 10 April 1996).

¹⁸⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 2.

the solemnity of a trial,” after he uttered statements in support of García de la Vega.¹⁸⁶ On April 8, 1997, Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina’s mother and his father, Ramón Rodríguez, were taken to a police station and forced to sign an *acta de advertencia*, an “official warning,” and told they if they continued to defend their son they would be arrested.¹⁸⁷

On July 31, 1997, as Cuba was about to host the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students (the last one was held in North Korea in 1989), Leyva Rodríguez reported that six *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia* members in Guantánamo province were visited in their homes by State Security agents. The activists were warned not to show themselves in public when delegates of the youth festival visited the province. Some of the activists were also members of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos Félix Varela*, Félix Varela Human Rights Commission, which is affiliated with the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*. Despite the warnings, the activists attempted to contact delegates to ask for help in gaining the release from prison of Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina. On August 2, 1997, activist Juan Carlos Herrera was arrested and held for two days by State Security. He was fined for “disorderly conduct” and threatened with imprisonment on a charge of “enemy propaganda” for having in his possession a copy of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights.¹⁸⁸

Another dissident youth organization, *Juvenil Ortodoxo del 2000*, Orthodox Youth of the Year 2000, was active in 1997 particularly in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, reporting on, among other things, conditions at the Boniato Prison.¹⁸⁹

There have also been reports of a group formed by people in their twenties called the “Elpidio Valdés Commandos.” The group is named after a Castro-era cartoon character, a fictitious colonel in Cuba’s war of independence from Spain. Reportedly based in the small town of Placetas, 150 miles east of Havana, group members are said to go out at night to paint slogans and spread leaflets critical of Fidel Castro. In October 1997, it was reported that five members of the group had been arrested in 1996. Three

¹⁸⁶ “Castro’s Hypocrisy,” unsigned editorial, *Miami Herald* (Miami: 9 July 1997). “Cuba’s Democratic Youth: Imprisonment, Punishment, Hunger Strike Mar International Youth Festival,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana: 29 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet* “July” archives, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁸⁷ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 11.

¹⁸⁸ Rodríguez Saludes, Omar. “Harassment Against Guantánamo Youth Movement,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana: 22 August 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁸⁹ “Prisoners at Boniato Prison Kept in Inhumane Conditions,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (Santiago de Cuba: 15 April 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 21 April 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

were subsequently put under house arrest, while Emis Martí and his cousin, Noel Ramos, formerly a resident of West Palm Beach, Florida, remained in prison. Martí and Ramos went on a hunger strike in October 1997 to demand a trial.¹⁹⁰

2. Women's Organizations

There are a number of independent women's organizations in Cuba, some Havana-based with branches in various provinces, others regionally based. Many have affiliated themselves with the *Concilio Cubano*, among them: the *Frente Cívico de Mujeres Martianas*, *Villa Clara*, Civic Front of Martí Women of Villa Clara Province; the *Movimiento de Madres Cubanas Por la Solidaridad*, Movement of Cuban Mothers for Solidarity; and the *Frente Femenino Humanitario*, Humanitarian Feminist Front.

A newer group, the *Organización Feminista Independiente* (OFI), Independent Feminist Organization, put out a statement which was published on the *CubaNet* web site in August 1997. The statement, signed by OFI president Cecilia Zamora Cabrera, criticized the "machismo" of Cuba's "totalitarian leader," and called on Cuban women to fight for "equal rights" in a Cuba "where the people's voices are not reduced to silence." The OFI is linked to the *Partido de Acción Nacional*, National Action Party, as Ingrid Torres Alvarez is a vice-president of both organizations.¹⁹¹

The *Foro Feminista*, Feminist Forum, is a Santiago de Cuba-based, *Concilio Cubano*-affiliated organization that has been particularly active since the end of 1996. It is headed by 50-year-old Deysi (or Daisy) Carcasés Valle, who is often referred to contemptuously by government authorities as *la rubia flaca*, "the skinny blonde." In December 1996, the *Foro Feminista* launched open protests which included reciting the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a church park. Founded in 1994, the group claims 50 active members, and says that many have been targeted for arrest, short-term detentions, threats of imprisonment and violent assaults by Rapid Response Brigades. As an example of how dissident organizations can overlap, Carcasés and another dissident leader, Rafaela Lasalle, operate an independent news agency in Santiago de Cuba, *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental* (APLO), Eastern Free Press Agency, and file dispatches directly to Radio Martí in Miami or through Havana-based independent news agencies for distribution abroad. Both Carcasés and Lasalle, who is the director of APLO (often referred to simply as *Prensa Oriente*), report that they are frequently harassed and threatened by State Security and the police. Carcasés was briefly

¹⁹⁰ Tamayo, Juan O. "Imprisoned in Cuba, Two Go on Hunger Strike," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 20 October 1997).

¹⁹¹ Statement published on 7 August 1997 on *CubaNet*, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

detained on August 15, 1997, and threatened with long-term imprisonment if she did not cease her activities.¹⁹²

3. Trade Unionists

The *Comisión Nacional de Sindicatos Independientes* (CONSI), National Commission of Independent Unions, an umbrella organization comprised of five independent Cuban unions, was formed in February 1993.¹⁹³ The five member unions were:

- *Unión General de Trabajadores de Cuba* (UGTC) - General Union of Cuban Workers.
- *Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Cubanos* (USTC) - Syndicated Union of Cuban Workers.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Ciudad Habana* (UTCH) - Union of Workers of the City of Havana.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Provincia Habana* (UTPH) - Union of Workers of the Province of Havana.
- *Unión de Trabajadores de Comercios* (UTC) - Union of Commercial Workers.

These unions were formed in large part by unemployed workers who had lost their jobs because of independent human rights or trade union activities.¹⁹⁴ From the start, CONSI affiliates and their members faced frequent harassment, including beatings and short-term detentions and penetration by undercover government agents.¹⁹⁵ Under such pressure, which was heightened by internal differences regarding the U.S. economic embargo, CONSI eventually came apart. Still, its affiliates remained in existence or evolved into new union organizations, including the *Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos* (CUTC), United Cuban Workers Council, a member of the *Concilio Cubano*.

¹⁹² Santiago, William. "Santiago de Cuba's Angry Feminists," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 25 March 1997). In this article, the name Carcasés is spelled "Carcassis." Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 9.

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p.16.

¹⁹⁴ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. *Report on ICFTU/ORIT Mission to Cuba - February 8-13, 1996* (Brussels: 1996), p. 6. The ICFTU is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. ORIT is the *Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores*, Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, the ICFTU's Latin American affiliate.

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Repression, the Exodus of August 1994, and the U.S. Response* (New York: October 1994), p.16.

CUTC president Pedro Pablo Alvarez, also the president of the USTC, was arrested, threatened, and released during the 1996 crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano*.¹⁹⁶

In May 1996, Néstor Baguer, head of the *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba* (APIC), Independent Press Agency of Cuba, reported on the activities of six independent trade unions:

- *Central Sindical Cristiana* (CSC), Christian Workers Central.
- *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba* (CTDC), Cuban Confederation of Democratic Workers.
- *Sindicato Independiente Baraguá* (SIB), Independent Union of Baraguá.
- *Unión Laborista de Cuba* (ULC), Labor Union of Cuba.
- *Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Cuba* (USTC), Syndicated Union of Cuban Workers.
- *Unión Sindical Independiente de Cuba* (USIC), Independent Syndicated Union of Cuba.

Baguer reported that all but one of the six unions was national, while the SIB was a union of independent farm workers based in Baraguá in eastern Cuba. He wrote that each union had as many as one hundred members.¹⁹⁷

Baguer did not mention the *Unión General de Trabajadores de Cuba* (UGTC), an original member of CONSI. But the UGTC continued to exist as it leaders, as well as leaders of the USTC, met in Havana in February 1996 with a delegation from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). At that time, the USTC favored maintaining the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba, while the UGTC leaned toward lifting the embargo and promoting change within the official, PCC-controlled union, the *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* (CTC), Cuban Workers' Central. Both the UGTC and the USTC reported harassment and intimidation by police and State Security, loss of jobs, and being labeled by the government as “stooges of the Americans” and “counterrevolutionaries.”¹⁹⁸

On February 2, 1997, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba* (CTDC), announced the formation of the *Congreso de Trabajadores Independientes*,

¹⁹⁶ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96), April 1996), p. 20.

¹⁹⁷ Baguer, Néstor. “El Movimiento Obrero en Cuba,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (Havana: 30 May 1996) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 30 May 1996, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

¹⁹⁸ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. *Report on ICFTU/ORIT Mission to Cuba - February 8-13, 1996* (Brussels: 1996), p. 4-6. The ICFTU is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. ORIT is the *Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores*, Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, the ICFTU's Latin American affiliate.

Independent Workers Congress, and appealed to all independent trade unions and organizations to join. Further reports indicated that other unions did join, but their names were not mentioned. In April 1997, the Congress issued a platform calling for, among other things, an end to “discrimination based on political opinion” and the “promotion of worker rights and labor justice.” The Congress also vowed its support for the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna*, Internal Dissidence Work Group. Those who signed the platform were José Orlando González Bridón, president of the CTDC; Ofelia Nardo Cruz; Gustavo Toirac; and Rafael García Suárez, organizing secretary of the CTDC.¹⁹⁹

At the end of April 1997, a workers rights organization, the *Coordinadora de Trabajadores Cubanos* (COC), Cuban Workers’ Coordinator, issued a declaration calling for “political democracy, social justice, and international solidarity.” The COC is linked to the *Oficina de Información de Derechos Humanos*, Human Rights Information Office, as Aida Valdés Santana is a director of both organizations.²⁰⁰

During the crackdown of summer 1997, numerous independent trade unionists were targeted. For example, CUTC organizer Gilberto Figueredo Alvarez was among a number of activists detained by State Security in Havana on June 20, 1997. Before being released he was told he was being given “a first and last warning,” and that no independent unions would be tolerated “because they are all CIA agents.” Three other CUTC activists were confined to their homes for two days, and the home of yet another was assaulted by a Rapid Response Brigade.²⁰¹ On August 21, 1997, Vicente Escobar Barreiro, director of the *Instituto de Estudios de Sindicalismo Cubano*, Institute for the Study of Cuban Trade Unionism, which is linked to the CUTC, was called in for questioning for the second time by an SUVP unit in Havana. He was warned that he would be arrested if he did not cease his union activities.²⁰² On July 22, 1997, Luis Mario Pared Estrada, organizational secretary of the CUTC in the eastern province of Granma, was arrested by State Security. On July 25, he was sentenced to a year in prison on a charge of “dangerousness,” and was placed in the Las Mangas prison near the city of Bayamo. CUTC national organizer Lázaro Cuesta Collazo reported that Pared Estrada is

¹⁹⁹ “Cuban Workers Organizing Independent Forum,” *Habana Press* (Havana) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 17 April 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁰⁰ *International Workers’ Day Declaration by Cuban Workers’ Coordinator*, report from Havana by independent journalist Monike de Mota - as reported on *CubaNet*, 2 May 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁰¹ “Workers’ Rights Activists Repressed by Police,” *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (7 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 11 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁰² “Independent Unionist Recalled for Questioning,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana: 21 August 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

also a member of the *Partido Democrático “30 de Noviembre” Frank País*, Democratic Party “30th of November” Frank País.²⁰³

In the first week of July 1997, CTDC president José Orlando González Bridón and CTDC organizing secretary Rafael García Suárez were arrested by police in Havana. Independent journalists reported that García Suárez was threatened and released on July 8, 1997, but that González Bridón was still being detained at that time.²⁰⁴ On October 3, 1997, it was reported that Florentino Ledesma and Jorge Martínez, the organizational secretary and secretary general of the *Central Democrática de Trabajadores de Cuba (Histórica)*, Democratic Central of Workers of Cuba, were detained for a day on the eve of a planned press conference in Havana. They were threatened with long-term imprisonment if they did not cease their independent labor activities. This worker organization may be an offshoot or faction of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba* (CTDC), Cuban Confederation of Democratic Workers.²⁰⁵

4. Political Prisoners Organizations

There are a number of organizations of former political prisoners and groups which provide support to current and former political prisoners. Among those that were affiliated with the *Concilio Cubano*, with the names of founders or leaders in parentheses, are:

- *Atención a Presos Políticos* - Attention to Political Prisoners (Roberto Hernández Morales).
- *Comité de Ayuda Humanitaria a Presos Políticos de Santiago de Cuba* - Santiago de Cuba Committee for Humanitarian Aid to Political Prisoners (Jorge H. Alfonso Aguilar).
- *Coordinadora de Presos Políticos* - Political Prisoner Coordinator (Aida Valdés Santana).
- *Comisión Humanitaria de Ayuda al Prisioneros Políticos* - Commission for Humanitarian Aid to Political Prisoners (Agustín Jesús Arcos Amoya).
- *Unión de Ex-Presos Políticos Ignacio Agramonte* - Ignacio Agramonte Union of Ex-Political Prisoners (Reiler Ramírez Muñíz).

²⁰³ Zúñiga, Jesús. “Detenido líder sindical independiente,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (Havana: 29 September 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 29 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁰⁴ *CubaPress* dispatch dated 10 July 1997 - as reported on *CubaNet*, 14 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁰⁵ Bagger, Néstor. “Persecución a dirigentes sindicales independientes,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (8 October 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 13 October 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

- *Unión de Ex-Presos Políticos, Camagüey* - Marcelino Soto Caballero.

One ex-prisoner group that is not known to have been a member of the *Concilio Cubano* is the *Club de Ex-Presos Políticos Gerardo González*, Club of Ex-Political Prisoners Gerardo González, founded on September 12, 1996, in Santiago de Cuba. On April 9, 1997, in Santiago de Cuba, it was reported that María Victoria Altunaga Benítez, a member of the *Movimiento Democracia y Paz Oriente*, Democracy and Peace Movement of the East, and of the *Club de Ex-Presos Políticos Gerardo González*, was detained for five hours by State Security and threatened with physical assault and imprisonment. It was also reported on April 9, 1997, that Orestes Rodríguez Orrutiner, president of the *Comité de Amigos del Club de Ex-Presos Políticos*, Committee of Friends of the Club of Ex-Political Prisoners, established as part of the Club in January 1997, was summoned to the State Security office in Santiago de Cuba, where he was threatened with imprisonment if he did not cease his involvement in “little counterrevolutionary groups.” Rodríguez Orrutiner stated that days earlier a group of people, apparently a Rapid Response Brigade or SUVP delegation, gathered in front of his house to shout “Sold out to Yankee imperialism!”²⁰⁶ On June 18, 1997, *Habana Press* reported that three members of the *Movimiento Pro Derechos Humanos Seguidores de Chibás*, Movement for Human Rights Followers of Chibás, were detained by State Security for protesting the imprisonment of the group’s president, Fidel Soria Torres. Soria Torres, who is also a vice-president of the *Club de Ex-Presos Políticos Gerardo González*, was reportedly sentenced to two years in prison on a charge of “dangerousness.”²⁰⁷

5. Professional Organizations

In recent years, numerous independent professional organizations have emerged. Many were founded by persons who lost their jobs or were expelled from official organizations for political beliefs deemed counter to Communist ideology or the interests of the state.

²⁰⁶ LaSalle, Rafaela. “Entrevista al Señor Fidel Soria Torres, Vicepresidente del Club de Ex-Presos Políticos Gerardo González,” *Oriente Press* (3 February 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 8 February 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>. “Represión masiva contra jóvenes in Santiago de Cuba,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC - as reported on “News from Santiago,” 16 April 1997, *CubaNet*, “April 1997” archives, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>. “Member of the Comité de Amigos del Club de Ex-Preso Políticos is Threatened,” *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, APIC (Santiago de Cuba: 15 April 1997) - as reported on *Cubanet*, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>

²⁰⁷ “Detenidos Varios Activistas Pro Derechos Humanos en Santiago de Cuba,” *Habana Press* (Havana: 18 June 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 20 June 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

The principal organization of independent lawyers is the *Corriente Agramontista*, Agramontist Current, which was founded in 1990 by, among others, Dr. René Gómez Manzano. The group has attempted to defend dissidents and openly criticized the political control of the judicial system (described in Chapter V of this report). The group, an original member of the *Concilio Cubano*, says that it seeks to reform the judiciary from within, but its formal request in February 1991 for official recognition by the government has been ignored. Its members are frequently detained by State Security and threatened. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that during 1996 it had received many complaints of arbitrary detentions, summonses to appear before the police and State Security, expulsions from law offices, and prison sentences for lawyers who attempted to practice their profession independently.²⁰⁸ Dr. Gómez Manzano was arrested on July 16, 1997, along with the other three founding members of the *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna*, Internal Dissidence Work Group. As of mid-September 1997, all four were still detained and under investigation for “counterrevolutionary” activities. On August 5, 1997, Gómez Manzano and another lawyer, Dr. Leonel Morejón Almagro, the *Concilio Cubano* national delegate, were awarded the International Human Rights Award from the American Bar Association’s Litigation Section.²⁰⁹

The principal organization of independent medical doctors is the *Colegio Médico Independiente de Cuba*, Independent Medical Association of Cuba, founded by Dr. Hilda Molina and Dr. Iraida de León in 1995. It is based in Havana but has affiliates in other provinces, for example the *Consejo Médico Cubano Independiente*, Independent Cuban Medical Council, in Piñar del Río province, founded by Dr. Jesús Ramón Marate Pozo.²¹⁰ On July 12-13, 1997, in Havana, the vice-president of the *Colegio*, Dr. Augusto Madrigal Izaguirre, was threatened by police in Havana with imprisonment if he did not cease his activities with the organization. On July 30, 1997, he was arrested by State Security and again threatened with imprisonment.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 689.

²⁰⁹ Appleson, Gail. “ABA Human Rights Award Winners Detained in Cuba,” *Reuters* (London: 5 August 1997).

²¹⁰ Fibla, Alberto. “El Colegio Independiente de Cuba,” *Diario Las Americas* (Miami: 14 December 1995).

²¹¹ *Harassment of Independent Cuban Physician*,” report by independent journalist Manuel David Orrio (15 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 17 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>. “Independent Professionals Arrested,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana: 30 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 August 1997.

The *Colegio Médico Independiente de Santiago de Cuba*, Independent Medical Association of Santiago de Cuba, is headed by Dr. Desi Mendoza Rivero, who was fired from his job after founding the organization. He was arrested by State Security on June 25, 1997, after making statements and providing information to foreign reporters and independent Cuban journalists regarding the dengue fever epidemic which had struck Santiago de Cuba. He provided the only unofficial reports about the number of deaths and accused the government of covering up the true extent of the epidemic. As of mid-September 1997, he was still under detention and being investigated for “enemy propaganda.” His wife, Caridad Piñon Rodríguez, reported that groups of people had gathered in front of their home to denounce her and her husband and that she had received threatening telephone calls. In a related case, journalist Juan Carlos Céspedes of the *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO)*, Eastern Free Press Agency, based in Santiago de Cuba, was detained by State Security for six days, June 12-18, 1997, after reporting statements about the epidemic made by Dr. Mendoza Rivero.²¹²

Other independent professional organizations include: the *Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes de Cuba*, Association of Independent Cuban Educators; *Colegio de Ingenieros Independientes de Cuba*, Association of Independent Cuban Engineers; and the *Colegio de Arquitectos Independientes de Cuba*, Association of Independent Cuban Architects. On January 31, 1997, it was reported that these three associations, along with the *Colegio Médico Independiente de Cuba*, had united to form the *Instituto de Integración Cubanoamericano*, Institute of Cuban-American Integration, through which the members hoped to form ties with counterpart organizations abroad.²¹³ On July 30, 1997, Miriam García Chavez, dean of the *Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes de Cuba*, was detained by State Security in Havana and threatened with imprisonment if she did not cease her activities with the organization.²¹⁴ On September 11, 1997, García Chavez told the *Miami Herald* that on September 5, three members of the *Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes de Cuba* had been detained during a round-up of at least eight

²¹² Amnesty International. *Medical Action* (Nederland, CO: 19 August 1997. EFE Spanish news agency (Havana: 9 September 1997).

²¹³ *Puja por José Martí entre Gobierno y Oposición de Cuba*, by independent Cuban journalist Manuel David Orrio - as reported on *CubaNet*, 3 February 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²¹⁴ “Independent Professionals Arrested,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana, 30 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 August 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

dissidents following the arrest of a Salvadoran national whom the Cuban government alleged was responsible for some of the recent bombings at Cuban tourist hotels.²¹⁵

On January 19, 1997, scientist and writer Rubier Rodríguez was released from prison on the condition that he immediately leave the country, which he did, leaving for Madrid on that same day. He had been arrested on February 13, 1992, and accused along with three other scientists at the Academy of Sciences in Havana of belonging to an “illegal” group called the *Generación Revolucionaria Nueva*, New Revolutionary Generation. He was accused of trying to spread a computer virus containing political propaganda, convicted of “rebellion,” and sentenced to ten years in prison.²¹⁶

6. Independent Farmers

There are at least two organizations of dissident or independent Cuban farmers. The first to emerge was the *Cooperativa Transición*, Transition Cooperative, based in Santiago de Cuba. In its mission statement issued on May 12, 1997, *Transición*, as it is commonly known, claimed to have 20 members (80 counting family members), developing 54 hectares of land as a “non-governmental” cooperative. The statement was signed by the *Transición* president, Jorge Béjar Baltazar. The group said it supported the “National Salvation Program” of the *Partido Cubano de Renovación Ortodoxa* (PCRO), Cuban Party of Orthodox Renovation, which advocates, among other things, an end to state control of agriculture and freedom of association. The PCRO claims to be a descendant of the party of the same name which existed before the revolution and is currently particularly active in Santiago de Cuba.²¹⁷

On July 27, 1997, PCRO president Diosmel Rodríguez Vega and PCRO Havana coordinator Rafael Santiago Montes were detained by State Security in Havana for questioning. During the operation, their homes were searched and *Transición* vice-president Antonio Alonso Pérez, who was present, was ordered by State Security to return immediately to Santiago de Cuba.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Alfonso, Pablo. “Cuba Arrests 14, linking them to bomb plot,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 12 September 1997). *Crece la Lista de Opositores Pacíficos Arrestados en Cuba*, report by Miriam García Chavez - as reported on *CubaNet*, 8 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²¹⁶ International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House (IFEX), *Action Alert* (31 January 1997) - as reported on IFEX, <http://www.ifex.org/>.

²¹⁷ *Cuba's New Independent Farmers: A Mission Statement* - as reported on *CubaNet*, 12 May 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²¹⁸ “Political Police Arrest Leaders of the Cuban Orthodox Renovation Party,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (Havana: 29 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 30 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

On August 12, 1997, it was reported that the *Transición* president and vice-president were expelled from the PCC-controlled *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (ANAP), National Association of Small Farmers. The two were then summoned for questioning by State Security.²¹⁹ On September 13, 1997, *Transición* president Béjar Baltazar stated that a horse had been killed and cattle robbed from the cooperative, but the authorities had refused to investigate.²²⁰

The second independent farmers organization is the *Cooperativa Independiente Progreso 1*, Independent Progress Cooperative 1, located in the southwest section of the municipality of Niceto Pérez, in the eastern province of Guantánamo. According to a report in early October 1997 by the *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental* (APLO), the cooperative is composed of 34 people in 11 families and it produces tobacco and various fruits on 91 hectares of land. The cooperative had recently sent a letter to the National Assembly to announce its formation as an entity independent of the PCC-controlled *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (ANAP), National Association of Small Farmers. The letter stated that the ANAP did not defend the interests of farmers. The cooperative listed Reinaldo Hernández Pérez as president and Joel Pérez Hernández, an agronomist, as vice-president.²²¹

7. Independent Environmentalists

Two of the known independent environmental groups are *Concilio Cubano* members. One is the *Movimiento Ecológico y Pacifista Naturpaz*, NaturePeace Ecological and Pacifist Movement, founded by lawyer Leonel Morejón Almagro, who was later elected *Concilio Cubano* national delegate and served fifteen months in prison in 1996-97 on charges of “resistance” and “disrespect.” The other is the *Grupo Ecológico Alerta Verde*, Green Alert Ecological Group, based in Piñar del Río province, whose president is Raúl Pimentel. They are commonly referred to as, respectively, *Naturpaz* and *Alerta Verde*.

Another group was formed in 1997, the *Agencia Ambiental Entorno Cubano* (A.A.M.E.C.), Cuban Open Environmental Agency. It was founded in Camagüey by

²¹⁹ “Agrarian Reformists Expelled from National Farmers’ Association,” *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental*, APLO (Santiago de Cuba) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 14 August 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²²⁰ Céspedes, Juan Carlos. “*Encubren Autoridades Vandalismo Contra Cooperativista Independiente*,” *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental*, APLO (Santiago de Cuba: 13 September 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 15 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²²¹ “*Constituida La Segunda Cooperativa Agropecuaria Independiente en la Región Oriental*,” *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental*, APLO (Guantánamo: 4 October 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 6 October 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

Eudel Cepero, a 35-year-old university-trained conservationist who in 1996 was awarded a six-month scholarship to study in the Netherlands by the Dutch government. When the Cuban government denied him permission to leave the country, he established the A.A.M.E.C. In its founding document, the organization defined itself as “independent and completely apolitical.”²²²

In November 1996, *Alerta Verde* issued a small publication called “Alerta Verde,” which held the government responsible for deforestation and environmental damage in Pinar del Rio. On July 5, 1997, Raúl Pimentel was arrested by State Security in that province. On July 9, 1997, the A.A.M.E.C. issued a declaration calling for the immediate release of Pimentel and requested the solidarity of environmental groups throughout the world on his behalf.²²³

B. Independent Journalists

The first organization of independent journalists, the *Asociación de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (APIC2), Association of Independent Cuban Journalists, was created by Yndamiro Restano Díaz in 1988-1989. At the time of his arrest and incarceration in 1991 (described earlier in Chapter IV on the Penal Code), Restano was preparing an issue of his bulletin, *Opinión*. After Restano’s imprisonment, journalist Néstor Baguer became director of APIC2 and renamed it *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, Independent Press Agency of Cuba. By mid-1995, there were at least three independent journalists organizations: APIC; *Patria*, Fatherland, founded by Roxana Valdivia Castilla in the central province of Ciego de Avila; and *Havana Press*, Havana Press, launched by Rafael Solano. Solano and many of the other journalists involved had worked for the state media and been fired usually for some form of “ideological incompatibility.”²²⁴ The journalists working for the new agencies immediately became targets of frequent harassment, intimidation and short-term detentions.²²⁵

²²² The A.A.M.E.C.’s founding document and Eudel Cepero’s biography are available on the A.A.M.E.C. web site, <http://www.cubanet.org/entorno>, which is part of the *CubaNet* site. Unlike virtually every organization in Cuba, this one places periods in between the letters of its acronym.

²²³ Peraza Linares, Hector. “Alerta Verde, Nueva Publicación Independiente,” *Havana Press* (Havana: 13 November 1996) - as reported on *CubaNet*, “November 1996” archives, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²²⁴ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p. 5.

²²⁵ Congressional Research Service. *Cuba: Exile or Prison* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, May 1996), p. 2. This document is an English translation of a report by *Reporters Sans Frontières*, Reporters Without Frontiers, a French organization that advocates for freedom of expression.

As dissident groups moved toward greater cooperation in 1995, a similar process was occurring among independent journalists. On September 19, 1995, Yndamiro Restano Díaz, who recently had been released from prison, founded the *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (BPIC), Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba, to coordinate the work of the APIC, *Patria*, and *Habana Press*. By the end of 1995, BPIC encompassed at least 20 journalists working in Havana and nine out of fourteen provinces.²²⁶

By that time, independent journalists were taking advantage of the significant upgrade in telecommunications between Cuba and the United States in late 1994. Cuba's independent journalists are prohibited from publishing newspapers or magazines, so they send their articles abroad for publication and for re-transmission back to Cuba by radio or the Internet. Articles are sent either by fax or dictated over the phone, and a number of independent journalists have contributed to U.S., Latin American, and European newspapers. With State Security constantly confiscating office equipment and disconnecting telephone lines—fax machines, typewriters, photocopiers, satellite dishes, modems, and access to the Internet are illegal unless authorized by the government—the independent journalists are always scrambling to connect with their contacts outside Cuba. Volunteers in Florida and Europe built a West Palm Beach-based web site, *CubaNet* (<http://www.cubanet.org>), for the journalists, and now e-mail articles to more than 700 subscribers, including many in Cuba. Access to the Internet is prohibited by the government, the only Internet provider in Cuba, except for official institutions. But those with access occasionally share it with friends and family.²²⁷

Cuba's independent news agencies have now managed to place correspondents in most of the provinces outside Havana and some agencies themselves are based outside the capital. That has expanded the flow of uncensored information from throughout the island. In March 1997, one source estimated that there were some 60 independent journalists in Cuba. Except for occasional fees from foreign newspapers, independent journalists receive no payment for their work. They survive with the support of family, friends, and the Paris-based *Reporters Sans Frontières*, Reporters Without Borders,

²²⁶ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96, April 1996), p 7. Congressional Research Service, *Cuba: Exile or Prison* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, May 1996), p. 1-2. This document is an English translation of a report by *Reporters Sans Frontières*, Reporters Without Frontiers, a French organization that advocates for freedom of expression.

²²⁷ Ackerman, Elise. "Guerrilla Journalism: The Underground Press Fights for an Audience," *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 9 March 1997).

which sends a little over \$1,000 each month to be divided among the independent news agencies.²²⁸

Although the reporting by Cuba's independent journalists is occasionally uneven—not surprising given the arduous conditions under which they must operate—most make every effort to be accurate. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba stated in his most recent report that Cuba's independent news agencies “maintain high professional standards.”²²⁹ In October 1996, the Inter-American Press Association awarded its Grand Prize for Press Freedom to four independent Cuban press agencies and an association of journalists and writers: the BPIC, *Habana Press*, *CubaPress*, *Patria*, and the *Unión de Periodistas e Escritores Cubanos Independientes* (UPECI), Union of Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers. The UPECI was founded by journalist María de Los Angeles González. She edited the inaugural issue of the UPECI publication, *Transición*, in February 1996, for which she was arrested and placed under investigation for “rebellion” and “enemy propaganda.”²³⁰

As of September 1997, independent news agencies operating in Cuba, with their main offices in Havana unless otherwise noted, included:

- *Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba* (APIC), Independent Press Agency of Cuba.
- *Agencia de Prensa Llanura*, Prairie Press Agency. Based in the city of Matanzas, about fifty miles east of Havana.
- *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (ANP), New Press Agency.
- *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental* (APLO), Eastern Free Press Agency. Based in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba. Often referred to simply as *Prensa Oriente*.
- *Buró de Periodistas Independientes de Cuba* (BPIC), Bureau of Independent Journalists of Cuba.
- *Centro-Norte Press* (CNP). Based in the north-central province of Villa Clara.
- *CubaPress*, Cuba Press.
- *Habana Press*, Havana Press.
- *Línea Sur Press*, South Line Press. Based in the south-central province of Cienfuegos. Has links with an independent news agency in Puerto Rico, *Línea Sur 3*,

²²⁸ Ackerman, Elise. “Guerrilla Journalism: The Underground Press Fights for an Audience,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 9 March 1997).

²²⁹ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 8.

²³⁰ Inter-American Press Association Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information. *Conclusions and Country by Country Report* (Miami: 18 March 1997), p. 9.

and the Puerto Rico-based *Pro Prensa Libre e Independiente para Cuba* (PPLIC), Free and Independent Press for Cuba, as well as with the BPIC.

- *Patria*, Fatherland. Based in the central province of Ciego de Avila, with correspondents in the neighboring province of Camagüey as well.
- *Pinar Press*. Based in the western province of Pinar del Río.

In July 1997, there was a report by a *Habana Press* correspondent about another independent press agency, *Caribe Press*, operating in Santiago de Cuba. The report said that *Caribe Press* president Enrique Copello Véliz had been temporarily detained by State Security in connection with the arrest of Dr. Desi Mendoza Rivero, who had been providing information to independent journalists on the dengue fever epidemic in Santiago de Cuba.²³¹

There are also a number of independent journalists who have found ways to file stories directly to *CubaNet*. Among the more prominent are Manuel David Orrio and Monike de Mota, both of whom also file through APIC. They and others file stories also with the Miami-based *Buró de Información del Movimiento Cubano de Derechos Humanos*, Information Bureau of the Cuban Movement of Human Rights, headed by exiled former political prisoner Ariel Hidalgo, which distributes them to foreign media outlets and on the Internet.

In late summer 1997, a writer calling himself Pablo Cedeño began filing reports and editorial commentaries from Havana directly to *CubaNet* for posting on its web site. Cedeño identified himself as part of something called the *Agencia de Prensa Decoro*, Decorum Press Agency.²³²

From the outset, the government has regarded independent journalists as “counterrevolutionaries” and “enemies,” and they are frequently excoriated in the state-controlled media. For example, *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), has referred to independent journalists as “the fifth column of American imperialism,”²³³ and accused them of “treason to the fatherland.”²³⁴

Independent journalists are targeted with the same forms of repression as independent human rights monitors and other dissident groups—frequent detentions,

²³¹ “Arrests, Detentions Against Dissidents in Santiago,” *Habana Press* (Santiago de Cuba: 1 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 4 July 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²³² For example, see Pablo Cedeño, “Pobre pesito mío,” *Agencia de Prensa Decoro* - as reported on *CubaNet*, 29 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²³³ International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House (IFEX). *Action Alert* (10 July 1997) - as reported on IFEX at <http://www.ifex.org/>.

²³⁴ Calzon, Frank. “Let Cubans, Too, Watch CNN,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 14 March 1997).

assaults by Rapid Response Brigades and the SUVP, systematic impoverishment, internal banishment, and prolonged prison terms and forced exile, as occurred during 1995-96 in the cases of: Yndamiro Restano Díaz, the founder of the APIC and the BPIC; Rafael Solano, the founder of *Habana Press*; and Roxana Valdivia Castilla, the founder of *Patria*.²³⁵

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has charged that independent journalists are victimized by systematic government wire-tapping and denial of telephone services. Since 1996, reports of lines being interrupted or disconnected have steadily increased. When telephones are working, the government frequently uses them to make hostile and threatening calls to independent journalists. Government tapping is sometimes done openly, with State Security agents breaking into conversations. Members of the official press often participate with Rapid Response Brigades and the SUVP in “acts of repudiation” against independent journalists.²³⁶

Between 1992 and August 1997, the Committee to Protect Journalists recorded 80 attacks on independent Cuban journalists, including arrests, “acts of repudiation,” short-term detentions, beatings and 14 prison sentences.²³⁷ During a four-day period beginning on February 9, 1997, Raúl Rivero Castañeda, the founder and director of *CubaPress* and an acclaimed poet, and nine other journalists were subjected to “acts of repudiation.”²³⁸ According to the Paris-based *Reporters Sans Frontières*, Reporters Without Borders, in the first eight months of 1997, 25 independent journalists were detained for interrogation and threatened with long prisons if they did not cease their activities or go into exile, and at least 12 more had been held in jail for two days or more.²³⁹ Between April and October 1997, the Inter-American Press Association recorded 24 detentions of independent journalists, nine cases of imprisonment, seven “acts of repudiation,” and three cases of “forced internal exile.”²⁴⁰

²³⁵ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Dissidents Imprisoned or Forced into Exile* (London: AMR 25/29/26, July 1996), p. 13-18. Ackerman, Elise. “Guerrilla Journalism: The Underground Press Fights for an Audience,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 9 March 1997). Inter-American Press Association Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information. *Conclusions and Country by Country Report* (Miami: 18 March 1997), p. 8-9.

²³⁶ Oppenheimer, Andres. “Firm Probes Wiretaps of Cuban Press,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 21 October 1996). Inter-American Press Association Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information. *Conclusions and Country by Country Report* (Miami: 18 March 1997), p. 9.

²³⁷ Tamayo, Juan O. “Top Journalist Arrested as Cuba Expands Sweeps,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 13 August 1997).

²³⁸ “Cuba’s Unfree Press,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 13 February 1997).

²³⁹ *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders). Press Release (Paris, 5 September 1997) - as reported on Reporters Without Borders web site at <http://www.calvacom.fr/rsf/>.

²⁴⁰ EFE Spanish news agency (Guadalajara: 20 October 1997).

On August 12, 1997, *CubaPress* director Raúl Rivero Castañeda was arrested at his Havana home and taken to the Villa Marista State Security headquarters. He had been briefly detained in police stations and subjected to “acts of repudiation” numerous times previously. State Security agents searched his apartment and confiscated his office equipment, personal papers, and the *CubaPress* files. Rivero was released on August 15, after being threatened with long-term imprisonment if he did not cease his journalistic activities or leave the country. Previously, on June 4, 1997, police had visited Rivero’s elderly mother and pressured her to urge her son to leave the country or abandon his work.²⁴¹ On August 14, 1997, Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, director of *Linea Sur Press*, South Line Press, an independent news agency based in the south-central province of Cienfuegos, was detained by State Security and released three days later to await trial on a charge of *difamación*, “defamation,” reportedly on the grounds that he had insulted government officials, including Fidel Castro, in his articles. According to Amnesty International, which reported that at least 19 independent journalists were detained between April and August 20, 1997, Arévalo Padrón was forbidden to leave his home town of Aguada de Pasajeros and as of August 20, 1997, no trial had taken place.²⁴²

At the time of Raúl Rivero’s release on August 15, 1997, it was reported that Julio Martínez García, deputy director of *Habana Press*, had left the country for Spain under threat of imprisonment.²⁴³ On July 28, 1997, two other independent journalists had been forced into exile, threatened with imprisonment if they did not leave Cuba: Olanec Noguera Rofe, a BPIC correspondent in the south-central province of Cienfuegos; and Lázaro Lazo Alfonso, a BPIC director in Havana and chief of *Libertad2*, Liberty, the BPIC-affiliated news agency in Havana Province. Prior to his departure, Noguera Rofes had been detained by police or State Security nearly 20 times.²⁴⁴ Lorenzo Paez Núñez, a journalist for the BPIC and the *Agencia Nueva Prensa* (ANP), New Press Agency, ignored similar threats and in early August was tried and convicted of “disrespect”

²⁴¹ Newman, Lucia. *CNN Transcript* (Havana: 12 August 1997) - as reported on the *CNN Interactive* web site: <http://cnn.com/index.html>. Tamayo, Juan O. “Top Journalist Arrested as Cuba Expands Sweep,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 13 August 1997). “Authorities Release Dissident Journalist,” EFE Spanish news agency (Havana: 15 August 1997).

²⁴² Amnesty International. *Cuba: Renewed Crackdown on Peaceful Government Critics* (London: AMR 25/29/97, August 1997), p. 4-6.

²⁴³ EFE Spanish news agency (Havana: 17 August 1997).

²⁴⁴ Corzo, Cynthia. “2 Cuban Journalists Make U.S. Their Home,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 6 August 1997). Ackerman, Elise. “Guerrilla Journalism: The Underground Press Fights for an Audience,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 9 March 1997).

against the national police and sentenced to 18 months in prison.²⁴⁵ Héctor Peraza Linares, the co-director of *Habana Press* was arrested on June 23, 1997, and taken to State Security headquarters in Pinar del Río province. Peraza Linares was released on September 23, 1997, after having been held for 92 days without charge. Authorities did not return to him equipment—a computer, typewriter, and camera—seized at the time of his arrest.²⁴⁶

During the numerous “acts of repudiation” against independent journalists in 1997, Rapid Response Brigade members frequently chanted passages from Article 8 of Law 80, the *Ley de Reafirmación de la Dignidad y Soberanía Cubana*, Law of Reaffirmation of Cuban Dignity and Sovereignty. Implemented by the Cuban government on December 24, 1996, Law 80 is often referred to as the “antidote” law to the U.S. Helms-Burton Act. Cuban independent journalists call it the “muzzle law.” One clause of Article 8 makes it a crime for Cubans to cooperate in any way with news organizations that publish or divulge U.S. government arguments in favor of Helms-Burton. Another clause makes it illegal to disclose any information that “favors the application” of Helms-Burton.²⁴⁷

In June 1997, the Cuban government instituted new regulations for the approximately 110 accredited foreign journalists working in Cuba. The regulations were clearly designed to intimidate the foreign press corps. The regulations require that foreign journalists be “objective” in their reporting, “paying rigorous attention to events in conformity with the ethical principles that control the exercise of journalism.” Failure to adhere could result in a journalist having his or her accreditation temporarily or definitively revoked, “according to the circumstances and the consequences of the fault committed.” The regulations require that Cuban journalists who wish to work for foreign news organizations must first be contracted by a government employment agency that will act as an intermediary with the news organizations. Cuban independent journalists believe the law is designed to discourage the foreign media from contacting them and reporting on their plight and the situation of dissidents in general. Foreign journalists also expressed concern about the evident attempt to circumscribe their activities.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Tamayo, Juan O. “Top Journalist Arrested as Cuba Expands Sweep,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 13 August 1997).

²⁴⁶ Amnesty International. *Prisoner of Conscience* (Nederland, CO: UA 200/97, 7 July 1997), 1 p. *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders). *Journalist Hector Peraza Linares Released*, Action Alert (26 September 1997) - as reported on the web site of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House (IFEX), <http://www.ifex.org/>.

²⁴⁷ Rohter, Larry. “Cuba Measure Strikes Back at the U.S.,” *New York Times* (New York: 11 January 1997).

²⁴⁸ Kerry, Frances. *Reuters* (London: 4 June 1997). *Associated Press* (New York: 5 June 1997).

C. Repatriated Persons

Since 1995 a number of countries have reached agreements with Cuba for the return of Cubans who have left the island without authorization, usually by sea. As documented in this section, by Fall 1997 more than a thousand Cubans had been repatriated. Most were sent back by the United States and the Bahamas, while smaller numbers were returned by the Cayman Islands, a British protectorate, and Jamaica.

The Cayman Islands and the United States signed separate accords with Cuba in May 1995. The Bahamas reached an agreement with Cuba in January 1996. Jamaica reached an accord with Cuba in May 1996.

Between 1994 and 1996 hundreds of Cubans were also returned to the island by Sweden.²⁴⁹ Many came from the former Soviet Union and sought political asylum in Sweden. As will be discussed later in this section, there has been no agreement between Cuba and Sweden and since 1996 Cuba no longer accepts Cubans whom Sweden wants to repatriate.

On May 2, 1995 the U.S. and Cuba signed a bilateral immigration accord in which Cuba agreed to accept the return of Cubans who had fled the island and had been interdicted by the U.S. The U.S. stated that migrants who were determined to have a credible or well-founded fear of persecution in Cuba and who were not otherwise ineligible for protection would not be returned. Under the accord, Cuba pledged to "ensure that no action is taken against those migrants returned to Cuba as a consequence of their attempt to emigrate illegally."²⁵⁰ The accord allowed for officials of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana to monitor the well-being of those people repatriated by the U.S. As of September 17, 1997, the U.S. had repatriated 764 Cubans under the 1995 agreement, according to the Cuban government.²⁵¹

The Bahamas and Cuba signed an accord on January 12, 1996. Cuba agreed to accept the repatriation of Cubans who had arrived illegally in the Bahamas after August 4, 1994 at a rate of up to 30 per month. Cuba assured the Bahamas that no harm would come to migrants on their return, but there was no provision in the Bahamas-Cuba accord for monitoring their well-being. The Bahamian government stated that all Cubans who arrived in the Bahamas illegally would be screened by government officials and representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to determine

²⁴⁹ "Cuba: Hundreds of Refugees Stranded, Sweden Says," story compiled from wire-service dispatches by the *Miami Herald*, 16 July 1997; *Associated Press*, 16 July 1997; and Interview with Lourdes Quirch of the Miami-based Guantánamo Refugee Assistance Project, 19 September 1997.

²⁵⁰ White House Office of the Press Secretary, Joint Statement (Washington, DC: 2 May 1995).

²⁵¹ Fletcher, Pascal. "U.S. Returns 21 Illegal Migrants to Cuba," *Reuters* (London: 17 September 1997).

whether they qualified as political refugees under United Nations Conventions.²⁵² By the beginning of September 1997, 356 Cubans were returned by the Bahamas under the 1996 accord.²⁵³

In early May 1995 the British government announced that it had authorized the governor of the Cayman Islands to repatriate to Cuba "Cuban migrants who arrive in the Cayman Islands subject to the usual internationally accepted screening and appeals procedure." The announcement followed an agreement between Cuba and the Cayman Islands for the repatriation of Cubans who arrived illegally in the Cayman Islands. Cuba assured the Cayman Islands that no harm would come to migrants on their return, but there was no provision in the Cayman-Cuba accord for monitoring their well-being. A year later, in May 1996, Jamaica reached a similar agreement with Cuba.²⁵⁴

Of the various repatriation agreements, only the U.S.-Cuba accord provided for monitoring of the well-being of repatriated Cubans. In 1997 U.S. officials said that Cuba had for the most part abided by its promise not to punish returnees. During an interview on July 15, 1997, an official of the U.S. State Department said: "In general, the Cubans are adhering to the agreement...there doesn't seem to be a concerted government effort to harass these people."²⁵⁵

Human Rights Watch/Americas, the Forced Migration Project of the New York-Based Open Society Institute, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS), and Ambassador Carl-Johan Groth, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba, however, offer a different assessment, saying that repatriated Cubans are subjected to discrimination and other forms of retribution. Human Rights Watch/Americas reported in October 1995, five months after the accord went into effect, that several cases of reprisals had already been reported since the repatriations began. Ulises Cabale and his brother César Cabale said that since their return on May 9, 1995, they had been harassed and watched by State Security agents. Four other people made similar statements.²⁵⁶

On May 18, 1995, 17-year-old José Acevedo Pérez, a Cuban rafter, was badly beaten by police six days after he had been repatriated. Acevedo was being arrested for a

²⁵² Bohning, Don. "Ballplayers May Yet be Sent Back," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 25 March 1998).

²⁵³ Reuters (Havana: 3 September 1997).

²⁵⁴ Reuters. "Caymans to Return Refugees," *Miami Herald*, (Miami: 3 May 1998).

²⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State. Telephone interview with Department of State Official, 15 July 1997.

²⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 30-31. Correa, Armando, "Cuban Rafter: 'Harassment has Begun'," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 11 May 1995).

common crime, disorderly conduct, but said police jeered at him for trying to leave the country. Acevedo also reported that he had experienced ongoing harassment for trying to flee.²⁵⁷ According to the U.S. Department of State, “the U.S. Interests Section in Havana raised the mistreatment of Acevedo with the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In response, the government of Cuba reported that unauthorized force had been used by the police and a police official apologized for the incident.”²⁵⁸

Human Rights Watch/Americas also described the case of two people who reported frequent visits to their home by police, CDRs, and State Security agents, and the case of a man whose son was expelled from school because the father’s attempt to leave the country had led to him being labeled a “counterrevolutionary.” It was also reported that a professor had been unable to return to his job because his attempt to flee had made him unsuitable for direct contact with students.²⁵⁹ According to a U.S. State Department official, the U.S. raised the professor’s case with the Cuban government; after four months the professor was re-hired at his old salary, but in a non-classroom research position.²⁶⁰

The Forced Migration Project division of the New York-based Open Society Institute sent a mission to Havana and Camagüey province from June 25-29, 1995, to review the procedures required by the May accord. The mission confirmed the reports by Human Rights Watch/America of reprisals in the cases of the Cabale brothers; Alvaro Zamora Hernández, the university professor; and José Acevedo Pérez, the youth beaten by police. The mission further reported that a physician, Dr. David Oliva, had been fired from his job in reprisal for treating Acevedo Pérez. Ulises Cabale presented the mission with the letter he received informing him of his job termination. The letter states specifically that he was fired because he had “tried to abandon the country,” and constituted “a dangerous example for the rest of the workers.” The mission concluded that, “[f]or the most part, returned rafters subsist as unemployed political ‘untouchables,’ waiting for a domestic political change or the chance to leave.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 31.

²⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State. Fax communication to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Resource Information Center, 14 October 1998.

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 31.

²⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State. Telephone interview with Department of State official, (Washington, DC: 15 July 1997).

²⁶¹ Letter from Arthur C. Helton, Director, Forced Migration Projects, Open Society Institute to Peter Tarnoff, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State (New York: 12 December 1995).

According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS) and the United Nations Special Rapporteur, the situation of repatriates did not change after 1995. In its annual report issued in March 1997, the IACHR-OAS, relying on “an abundance of information provided by non-governmental organizations in Cuba and abroad,” stated that it “has been informed that in practice the persons repatriated, though not placed on trial, continue to suffer all types of discrimination on political grounds, especially when they seek employment.”²⁶² According to Milton Castillo, the lead investigator on the IACHR-OAS Cuba report, the Commission received “many complaints, directly from the island and from reliable NGOs outside Cuba, regarding firings and inability to find work among the repatriates... We matched and double-sourced in order to confirm the reports.”²⁶³ The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba, in his report issued in January 1997, concluded that Cubans who attempt to leave the country and are repatriated confront “de facto discrimination” by the Cuban government.²⁶⁴

At a House of Representatives joint subcommittee hearing on 27 June 1996, María R. Dominguez, Executive Director of the Human Rights Institute at St. Thomas University in Miami, presented a statement concerning the Cuban government’s treatment of repatriated persons, based on testimony from repatriated persons themselves and other sources in Cuba. One of Dominguez’s sources was Dr. Desi Mendoza Rivero, whom she interviewed prior to his arrest in June 1997, as described in Chapter XVI, Section A.5. of this report. Dr. Mendoza, a human rights activist, was a rafter who was returned to Cuba from the U.S. base in Guantánamo in April 1995 after being assured by INS officials that he would be able to apply for refugee status at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana (USINT).²⁶⁵

²⁶² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). “Cuba,” *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Washington, DC: 14 March 1997), p. 698. The Commission was not given permission by the Cuban government to send a delegation to Cuba. The Commission states on p. 671 that it “drew on several sources in preparing this report, such as the testimony of victims who have suffered violations of their rights in Cuba, complaints brought against the Cuban State, and an abundance of information provided by non-governmental organizations in Cuba and abroad.”

²⁶³ Interview with Milton Castillo, Lead investigator on the IACHR-OAS 1997 Cuba report (Washington, DC: 3 July 1997).

²⁶⁴ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 18.

²⁶⁵ *Human Rights Violations in Castro’s Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 114-124.

Dr. Mendoza, president of the *Movimiento Pacifista Pro Derechos Humanos*, Peaceful Movement for Human Rights, which became a member of the *Concilio Cubano*, was detained and interrogated for four days by State Security upon his arrival in Cuba. He was told by a State Security official that he had no better chance than any other Cuban to leave the island. After his release from detention, he applied for refugee status at the USINT. Nearly a year later, in February 1996, his application had yet to be processed by the USINT and his documentation was seized during the Cuban government's sweeping crackdown against *Concilio Cubano* members. More than a year after that, and just prior to his arrest in June 1997 for reporting on an outbreak of dengue fever, Dr. Mendoza's application for refugee status at the USINT in Havana was denied.²⁶⁶

Dr. Mendoza and his organization monitored the situation of repatriated Cubans during the period between his return to Cuba in 1995 and his arrest in 1997. He told Dominguez that repatriated people were abused in several ways:

- While acknowledging the general employment crisis in Cuba, Dr. Mendoza said that discrimination by the government made the situation more acute for repatriated people. He said the government in fact wanted to keep repatriated people unemployed and force them to commit "delinquent" acts in order to discredit them in the eyes of other Cubans and to jail them.²⁶⁷

According to Dr. Mendoza, as reported in Dr. Dominguez's testimony, other forms of abuse and actions taken by the Cuban government against repatriated people included:

- Persistent harassment, including being followed by police and having telephone calls monitored.
- Threats of physical violence against repatriated people and family members.
- Arbitrary search-and-seizure actions at their homes.
- Reprisals such as seizing or withholding *carnets*, personal identity cards, and other personal papers and documents essential for day-to-day survival in Cuba. For

²⁶⁶ *Human Rights Violations in Castro's Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 117-119.

²⁶⁷ *Human Rights Violations in Castro's Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 118-119.

example, without a *carnet* a person is considered *no confiable*, not trustworthy, and will not be given employment.

- Restrictions on travel within Cuba through control of *carnets*, making it extremely difficult to access the USINT in Havana.²⁶⁸

Dominguez notes other cases in which the Cuban government took action against repatriated people:

- Elier Orosa Ramírez. Orosa Ramírez was returned to Cuba from the U.S. base at Guantánamo in spring 1996. Days later he was arrested by State Security on a previous charge of “illegal departure,” convicted and sentenced to 10 months in prison. Despite pressure on the Cuban government by the USINT, he served the full 10 months. After completing his sentence he escaped Cuba again, and was picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard in Bahamian waters and taken to Nassau. Dominguez has since lost contact with him.
- Mario Cordova. Repatriated from the U.S. base at Guantánamo in 1996, arrested and sent to the same prison as Orosa Ramírez. Cordova’s family claims he was jailed on “trumped-up” charges so that the Cuban government would not be pressured by USINT because of another breach of the 1995 U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement, in which Cuba pledged to ensure that no action is taken against those migrants returned to Cuba as a consequence of their attempt to emigrate illegally. After his release from prison, Cordova escaped again from Cuba and was picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard and taken to Nassau. He was interviewed there by the Regional Legal Counsel of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and was granted refugee status.
- Eutimo Guzman Marrero. A human rights activist who attempted to leave Cuba a number of times. He was returned from the U.S. base in Guantánamo along with Orosa Ramírez and Cordova in 1996. He told Dominguez that many repatriated people were forced to live as homeless transients and outcasts. He escaped from Cuba again and made it back to the U.S. base in Guantánamo. That time he was granted refugee status.²⁶⁹

Dominguez also reported discrimination by the Cuban government against family members of those granted political refugee status, principally women and children,

²⁶⁸ *Human Rights Violations in Castro’s Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 118-120.

²⁶⁹ *Human Rights Violations in Castro’s Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 115-117.

including the loss of jobs and sometimes homes once the government learned that their immediate family member has been granted asylum by the United States.²⁷⁰

An independent Cuban news agency reported that on August 7, 1997, Dr. Walter Quesada Leguis, a 26-year-old physician, was arrested by State Security in the province of Guantánamo and held for six days. It was reported that he was threatened with a long-term prison sentence if he did not cease his activities as a member of the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, Youth for Democracy Movement, a group which has been targeted for especially severe punishment by the Cuban government, as described in Section A, Part 1, of this chapter. It was further reported that Dr. Quesada's associates believed he was personally targeted because he had fled the country in early 1997 by crossing into the U.S. base at Guantánamo, from where he was returned to Cuba by U.S. Immigration officials. Upon his return he was fired from his government job as a family doctor. On March 5, 1997, Dr. Quesada was interrogated by State Security in Guantánamo Province, and questioned specifically about his "illegal departure." It was not reported whether Dr. Quesada made known to U.S. Asylum Officers his affiliation with the dissident youth organization.²⁷¹

The U.S. Department of State, Office of Asylum Affairs offers the following information on the status of repatriates. It is the Department's understanding, based on reports from the U.S. Interests Section (USINT) in Havana, that the majority of returnees have not suffered reprisals. According to USINT, there have been instances of harassment by local officials and some previously-employed persons have had employment problems upon return. However, USINT reported that many of the returnees who are unemployed upon their return were already unemployed before their attempt to leave Cuba, and are indistinguishable in this respect from other unemployed Cubans. According to USINT, some returnees who complained of unemployment had not applied for the jobs from which they complained that they were excluded. USINT also reported that repatriates who were formally employed when they attempted to leave the country generally have been returned to their jobs. Some professionals and other persons

²⁷⁰ *Human Rights Violations in Castro's Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 114-115.

²⁷¹ López Prendes, Luis. "Detienen a miembro de grupo juvenil," *Informaciones del Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Havana: 2 September 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 3 September 1997. *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Havana: 5 March 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 11 March 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

previously employed in areas deemed sensitive, however, have not been given back their original jobs, although some of these were offered alternative employment.²⁷²

USINT monitors the treatment of migrants returned under the terms of the 1995 U.S.-Cuba migration accord to ensure that they are not harassed for their illegal exit. Only USINT consular officers are permitted by the Cuban government to participate in monitoring visits, augmented by consular officers from other U.S. posts who are occasionally detailed to Havana for short periods for this purposes. As in all travel outside Havana, based upon U.S. - Cuban reciprocity, restrictions imposed on U.S. officials require that a travel itinerary be provided to Cuban authorities three days prior to each monitoring visit. Each returnee, with the exception of those who live in the Havana province, is visited at least twice during the first year following repatriation and once during the second year. Those who live in the Havana province are not visited in their homes, but are free to visit USINT as necessary. USINT monitors are able to carry out their monitoring functions without interference from the Government of Cuba. In calendar year 1997, USINT officers made 12 monitoring trips, during which they made a total of 675 visits. Of these, 184 were first-time visits, and 491 were follow-up visits to returnees who had been previously visited. Visits are made to the homes of returned migrants by a pair of monitors. According to USINT, most returnees appear comfortable discussing their situations with the monitors in that environment. However, in addition, all returnees have passes to enable them to visit USINT at any time, so that if they do not feel comfortable discussing their situations in their own homes, they may visit USINT to do so. In addition to the returnees who live in the Havana province, on average ten returnees a month from outside the Havana province visit USINT to discuss their situations and migratory options.²⁷³

According to Maria Dominguez, based on sources in Cuba, some Cuban citizens have encountered the following problems when attempting to make visits to USINT:

- On several occasions, Cuban citizens have been blocked by Cuban authorities from reaching the USINT—“most common when the citizen is trying to ask for information related to refugee processing or attempts to report human rights violations.”

²⁷² U.S. Department of State, Office of Asylum Affairs. Fax communications to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Resource Information Center (Washington, DC: 31 March 1998 and 14 October 1998).

²⁷³ U.S. Department of State. *U.S. Interests Section Monitoring of Returned Migrants* (Washington, DC: 14 October 1998), 1 p.

- Many people complained that it was “impossible” to apply in person for refugee status at the USINT, and, when told by U.S. officials to apply by mail, expressed fear that the Cuban postal system “does not protect the right to privacy necessary to prevent government reprisals.”²⁷⁴

It should be emphasized that the Cuban government pledged only not to take action against a repatriate for the particular act of fleeing that resulted in being returned. Moreover, attempting to leave the country without official authorization is still illegal. As described in Chapter IV of this report, under Penal Code Articles 216 and 217, those caught trying to leave the country without the permission of the government can be imprisoned for up to three years if they have not used violence and up to eight years if force or intimidation is used. Although recently there appears to be a trend toward lighter penalties -- e.g., fines and/or house arrest -- particularly in cases of first-time offenders, Articles 216 and 217 are still used to punish people for trying to leave the country without permission.

Under the bilateral agreements between Cuba and other countries, a repatriate can be prosecuted for any prior or later attempts to leave the country without authorization, or for any other activity deemed to be illegal by the Cuban government. As Cuban National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcón, one of Cuba’s principal negotiators of the accord, took care to point out, the agreement “does not preclude the obligation of the Cuban authorities to act against [repatriates] for reasons or crimes committed before or after the attempt [to leave the country].”²⁷⁵ In this regard it should be kept in mind that the Cuban government frequently uses less overtly political offenses to target persons for political reasons, as described in Section IV.

In one documented case, the BPIC reported that on September 25, 1997, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, a member of the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, was detained for interrogation by State Security in Guantánamo Province. He was warned that if he did not get a job, he would be arrested on a charge of “dangerousness.” BPIC reported that Herrera Acosta had attempted to flee Cuba and had been repatriated by U.S. Immigration officials in 1995. Upon his return he had been fired from his job in a food-processing center. As in the case of Dr. Quesada, it was not

²⁷⁴ *Human Rights Violations in Castro’s Cuba: The Repression Continues*, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. Statement presented by Maria R. Dominguez (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 27 June 1996), p. 114-115.

²⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 28.

reported whether Herrera Acosta had made known to U.S. Asylum Officers his affiliation with the dissident youth organization.²⁷⁶

Another noteworthy case is that of 27-year-old Roberto González Tibanear, who was returned to Cuba in March 1996 by the Swedish government after it had rejected his claim of political asylum. Prior to his departure to Sweden in July 1994 on a tourist visa, Cuban authorities had prohibited him from continuing in his job at the Spanish Embassy in Havana, reportedly because his views were not in accordance with those of the Cuban government. González Tibanear reported that as a result of his holding discussions with Cuban dissidents, he was placed under surveillance by State Security whom he feared were intending to arrest him. On November 26, 1996, eight months after Sweden returned González Tibanear to Cuba, he was arrested in Havana on charges of *desacato*, “disrespect,” and *desorden público*, “public disorder,” after making anti-government statements to foreign journalists. Amnesty International declared him a “prisoner of conscience.”²⁷⁷ González Tibanear was not tried until August 27, 1997, when he was convicted of *desacato*, “disrespect,” and sentenced to nine months in prison. As he had already been imprisoned for nine months, he was released on August 28, 1997.²⁷⁸

As of July 1997, about 200 Cuban migrants remained in Sweden. According to the Swedish Foreign Ministry, approximately 1,500 Cubans arrived in Sweden in 1994 seeking political asylum and Swedish authorities ruled that most of them did not qualify. Many arrived on tourist visas from the former Soviet Union where they had been living and working. Hundreds, including Roberto González Tibanear, were repatriated to Cuba

²⁷⁶ Fonseca Ochoa, Rafael. “Expulsan de su trabajo a repatriado de la base de Guantánamo,” *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Havana: 14 October 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 20 October 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁷⁷ Amnesty International. *Cuba: Prisoner of Conscience - Roberto González Tibanear* (London: AMR 25/16/97, 14 July 1997), 5 p.

²⁷⁸ Amnesty International. *Release of Prisoner of Conscience - Roberto González Tibanear* (London: AMR 25/33/97, 4 September 1997).

by early 1996. Since then, however, Cuba has refused to accept the return of Cubans from Sweden

In April 1997, an independent Cuban press report exposed a particular form of intimidation against repatriates; one that some Cuban human rights activists believe is linked to the Cuban government's desire to portray repatriates as economic migrants rather than refugees. Olanca Noguerras, the former and now-exiled BPIC correspondent in Cienfuegos province, reported that State Security there was requiring repatriates to answer a 12-point, written questionnaire, in which they were specifically asked, among other things, whether they had left for economic or political reasons. According to Noguerras, repatriates were being given the questionnaires personally by State Security agents and were informed they had 24 hours to complete them. Representatives of human rights organization in Cienfuegos said repatriates were afraid to answer the questions truthfully for fear of reprisals. Angel Eduardo Hernández Bernal of the *Partido Pro Derechos Humanos*, Party for Human Rights, in Cienfuegos, said, "all the questions are traps." Benigno Aznares López of the *Movimiento Maceísta por la Dignidad*, Maceísta Movement for Dignity, said, "The questionnaire is a blunt form of manipulation...[The government] wants to make it look like Cuban immigration is economic."²⁷⁹

D. Religious Institutions and Worshipers

Religious institutions in Cuba include the Roman Catholic Church, a number of Protestant denominations, an array of Pentecostal and evangelical congregations, and *Santería*, a syncretic system which combines African and Catholic belief. Historically, the Castro government has been highly antagonistic toward the Catholic Church, Pentecostals, and evangelicals. Cuba's main Protestant churches—Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist—have in part been coopted by the state and their leaders rarely, if ever, criticize the nature of the regime. Two Protestants actually hold seats in the PCC-controlled National Assembly.²⁸⁰ The practice of *Santería* is tolerated to a significant degree, and many important *Santería* priests also have been coopted by the government.

²⁷⁹ Olanca Noguerras, Olanca. "Reparte Seguridad del Estado Cuestionario a Repatriados," *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Washington, DC: 15 April 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 16 April 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁸⁰ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 39-40. Pax Christi Netherlands is a self-described "progressive" human rights group of the Roman Catholic Church with offices in 25 nations. The group is known in Latin America for its investigations and denunciations of human rights violations by right-wing and military governments in the 1980s. The group publicly opposes the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba.

After seizing power in 1959, the Castro government decreed Cuba to be an atheist state. Catholic Church property was nationalized and Catholic schools closed. A great number of foreign priests were expelled. In 1959 there were over 700 priests in Cuba, whereas in 1988 there were less than 225. Churches were forbidden to use broadcast communication media. Christians were not allowed to join the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) or hold public posts, and were discriminated against when seeking work from the state, Cuba's sole employer.²⁸¹

The Cuban government began to ease the restrictions on the Catholic Church as the economic crisis deepened following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union in 1989-1991. Faced with mounting discontent, the government evidently believed that greater freedom to worship would provide a non-political outlet for the expression of people's discontent. At the fourth PCC congress in 1991, the Constitution was amended to allow religious adherents to be members of the PCC, and the state, previously atheist, was declared "secular."²⁸² Since then, most ordinary Cubans have been able to practice the Catholic faith without facing punishment, as long as the government senses no political overtones.

The Church hierarchy welcomed the measures and decided to test the limits of the regime's tolerance in 1993 when the Cuban Bishops Conference issued a pastoral letter highly critical of the political system. The letter called for, among other things, an end to single-party rule and the state security system. The government responded with blistering attacks in the official media which called the Church "counterrevolutionary." For some time this cooled considerably the relationship between the Church and the government, but appeared to enhance the credibility of the Church with disaffected Cubans as more and more worshipers began attending mass.²⁸³

The next confrontation occurred when the Cuban bishops issued in March 1996 a public statement entitled "A Call to Reconciliation and Peace." In the statement, the bishops criticized the government's refusal to allow the *Concilio Cubano* to hold its planned meeting in February 1996 and the downing by Cuban fighter jets of two small civil aircraft flown by members of *Hermanos al Rescate*, Brothers to the Rescue, that

²⁸¹ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 34.

²⁸² Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 34.

²⁸³ Freedom House. "Cuba," *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1993-1994* (New York: Freedom House, 1996), p. 222. Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 34-36.

same month.²⁸⁴ Brothers to the Rescue is a Florida-based organization of anti-Castro Cuban exiles which seeks to assist Cuban *balseiros*, rafters, who have fled Cuba. In at least one instance prior to the shutdown, in which all four people aboard the aircraft were killed, the organization had dropped leaflets over Havana. The International Civil Aviation Organization subsequently concluded that the shutdown took place outside Cuban territorial airspace, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cuba regarded it as “a premeditated act” and stated that it “constituted a violation of the right to life of the four people.”²⁸⁵

In a response to the Cuban bishops’ statement, the PCC delivered a letter to the Church that accused the bishops of “coinciding with the enemies of Cuba” in their criticism of the downing of the airplanes, and rejected reconciliation with “those who plot terrorist acts against their native country.”²⁸⁶ Still, the response was more low-key than the government’s reaction to the pastoral letter three years before. Since 1993, the government has tried to improve relations with the Catholic Church as part of its tactical effort to project a more tolerant image abroad, as described in Chapter XII, and because the Vatican opposes the U.S. economic embargo. The Church, in turn, has sought to take advantage of the government’s maneuvering to leverage for itself a wider sphere of influence in Cuban society. Both sets of interests coincided when Fidel Castro met Pope John Paul II in the Vatican in November 1996 to arrange a papal visit to Cuba, currently scheduled for January 21-25, 1998. As of October 1997, the Pope was expected to visit Havana and the provincial cities of Santa Clara, Camagüey and Santiago de Cuba.²⁸⁷ Caridad Diego, chief of the PCC’s Office of Religious Affairs, stated in October 1997, that the Pope’s visit is “a way to show that the pope does not approve of the policies of isolating us.”²⁸⁸

As the Cuban Catholic Church began preparing for the Pope’s visit, it was given greater freedom by the government to conduct its mission. During the summer, Jaime Cardinal Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana, held two open-air masses, the first outdoor religious services permitted in more than three decades. In another concession, Cuban

²⁸⁴ Alfonso, Pablo. “Bishop’s Criticism Riles Cuba,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 4 August 1996).

²⁸⁵ UN Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Carl-Johan Groth, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/69 and Economic and Social Council decision 1996/275* (Geneva: E/CN.4/1997/53, 22 January 1997), p. 13-14.

²⁸⁶ Alfonso, Pablo. “Bishop’s Criticism Riles Cuba,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 4 August 1996).

²⁸⁷ Fletcher, Pascal. *Reuters* (London: 26 June 1997). Myers, Steven Lee. “U.S. Considers Easing Travel to Cuba During Visit by the Pope,” *New York Times* (New York: 19 August 1997).

²⁸⁸ Kovaleski, Serge F. “Cuba, Church Have Different Goals for Pope’s Visit,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 15 October 1997).

state television broadcast brief extracts from the first open-air mass, which was held in Havana on July 29, 1997. Earlier in the year, the Cuban government agreed to allow *Caritas Cubana*, a Catholic humanitarian agency, to monitor sales of U.S. medical equipment and medicines to Cuba.²⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the government's tolerance of the Catholic Church has strict limits and the Church still faces many restrictions. It cannot have its own schools, press, or access to newsprint and new priests need special permits to enter Cuba. There are still only about 260 priests for a population of about 11 million.²⁹⁰

On May 13, 1997, representatives from all religious denominations were summoned to PCC headquarters in Havana, where they were accused of abusing international travel and import permits. Caridad Diego, PCC chief of religious affairs, alleged that visas granted to religious institutions were being used to allow agents of the CIA and other foreign intelligence agencies into Cuba. Church representatives were also reminded that since December 1995, the sale of computers and photocopiers to churches was prohibited because they were needed in "priority institutions," and because they use excessive amounts of electrical power.²⁹¹ The government seemed to be signaling that it would not tolerate anything like the Polish scenario, in which the Polish Catholic Church, backed by the Pope, supported the dissident Solidarity movement against communist rule. That message has been reinforced by the harsh crackdown against Cuban dissidents, as described in Chapters XI, XII and XV, even as the government was seeking the visit from Pope John Paul II.

So, even as the Cuban government allows the Catholic Church to act as a channel through which disaffected Cubans can vent their frustrations, it is doubly determined to ensure that Cubans do not take advantage of greater religious freedom for political purposes. That was evident in a recent incident reported by the independent Cuba press. During a mass given by Jaime Cardinal Ortega on September 8, 1997, in the seaside community of Regla, Lázaro Fernández Valdés and Rodolfo Valdés Pérez, president and vice-president of the *Partido Federalista*, Federalist Party, shouted "Viva el Cardenal!" When the service ended, they were arrested by State Security and as of September 12,

²⁸⁹ Kerry, Frances. *Reuters* (London: 29 June 1997). Tamayo, Juan O. "U.S., Cuba Agree on a Monitor for Medical Purchases," *Miami Herald* (Miami: 20 June 1997).

²⁹⁰ *Associated Press* (New York: 16 August 1997).

²⁹¹ Campa, Homero. "Endurece el Control de la Iglesias, Por Caso de Incumplimientos, Abusos y Corrupción," *Proceso* (Mexico City, 25 May 1997). Campa is the *Proceso* correspondent in Havana.

their whereabouts were still unknown.²⁹² Other examples include the detentions in 1996 of two individuals who were warned by police not to organize religious commemorations on July 13, the anniversary of the sinking of the *13 de Marzo* tugboat in 1994 in which some 40 people died. Aída Rosa Jiménez of the *Movimiento de Madres Cubanas por la Solidaridad*, Cuban Mothers' Solidarity Movement, was threatened with imprisonment if she went to church on July 13, and Isabel del Pino Sotolongo, president of *Seguidores de Cristo Rey*, Followers of Christ the King, was threatened with several charges after being detained for displaying photographs of the victims of the tugboat sinking and distributing leaflets containing quotes from the Bible.²⁹³

Government surveillance of the Church has always been pervasive. In 1995, José Félix, secretary general of the Cuban Bishops Conference, stated, “[t]here is always someone at Mass who comes especially to see what we say and inform the authorities about it.”²⁹⁴ Now, however, having given a certain amount of latitude to the Church for tactical reasons, the government seems even more invasive. In March 1997, the Vatican news agency, *Fides*, reported that Cuban police and State Security “have increased the deployment of spies and collaborators inside Catholic groups.”²⁹⁵

As the Cuban government and the Catholic Church continued their charged minuet with the approach of the papal visit, the limits of the regime's tolerance were being tested in Pinar del Río province, where a Catholic publication, *Vitral*, has opened its limited number of pages to articles with an increasingly political edge by young, non-Catholic writers. *Vitral* is published by the *Centro Católico de Formación Cívica Religiosa* (CFCR), Catholic Center of Religious Civic Formation. The center has no press, so copies are limited to a thousand or so photocopies. But *Vitral* has gained in popularity and copies are passed from one person to the next. In May 1997, *Vitral* editor Dagoberto Valdés was warned by Isidro Gómez, the number two official of the PCC office of religious affairs, about the content of the publication and was told that “the language used is unacceptable.” Gómez said, “Be careful. This is not the first time in our country that the Catholic Church has been used for political purposes.” Referring to the young, non-Catholic writers *Vitral* often publishes, Gómez said, “[b]ehind some of these

²⁹² López Prendes, Luis. “Arrestados Dos Disidentes Por Saludar al Cardenal Ortega,” *Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, BPIC (Havana: 12 September 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 12 September 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

²⁹³ Amnesty International. “Cuba,” *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: 1997), p. 133.

²⁹⁴ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 38.

²⁹⁵ Tamayo, Juan O. “Before Papal Visit, Vatican Gets Tough on Cuba,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 20 March 1997).

people their could be a fifth column with other intentions far from the aims of the Church.”²⁹⁶

The Cuban government and the Catholic Church both wanted the Pope to visit Cuba, but they had competing objectives. The question was how far the Church would try to go to achieve its aims, and more importantly, how far the government would allow it to go before deciding the tactical benefits it was reaping outweighed the risks? In the past, the general pattern has been that the government would at times allow a certain easing of repression domestically to achieve international aims. However, whenever the government has perceived its complete control of the country threatened by such limited openings, a crackdown has ensued with little regard for international opinion. One example, described in Chapter VIII, was the jailing of 22 dissident leaders within a year after they had been interviewed by a delegation from the United Nations Human Rights Commission allowed into Cuba September 1988. Another example, described in Chapter XI, is the crackdown against the *Concilio Cubano* in 1996.

As part of the agreement regarding the Pope’s visit, the Cuban government granted the Catholic Church’s request to conduct 13 outdoor masses around the country during the fall of 1997. However, friction between the Church and government soon developed over public displays of faith. On Sunday, October 12, 1997, government officials blocked Cardinal Ortega from holding one of those outdoor services, and also blocked a planned public procession, in Bejucal, near Havana. The mass had to be held indoors.²⁹⁷

Another source of tension was the set of regulations decreed by the government on August 4 that sharply restricted the ability of religious organizations to buy a range of scarce goods, including basic products like soap, toilet paper, cooking utensils and personal hygiene articles that are essential to programs conducted by *Caritas*, the Catholic Church’s charitable assistance organization. The purchase of computers, fax machines, video cameras, photocopiers and other electronic goods was banned outright. In addition, *Fides*, the Vatican news agency, reported on October 7, 1997, that since March 1997, Cuban “supervisors in factories, hospitals, schools and institutes have threatened that whoever dares to participate in a papal Mass will be fired.” The report said some believers remained absent from their jobs for weeks at a time and “have suffered interrogation and threats.” It described the Cuban government as taking “a

²⁹⁶ Campa, Homero. “Inusitado Diálogo Entre Funcionarios y miembros de la Iglesia Católica en Cuba,” *Proceso* (Mexico City: 7 July 1997). Campa is the *Proceso* correspondent in Havana.

²⁹⁷ Kovaleski, Serge F. “Cuba, Church Have Different Goals for Pope’s Visit,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC: 15 October 1997). *Associated Press* (New York: 13 October 1997).

double attitude on religion—permits on one side, pressure on the other... The pressure is being applied especially against party members who sympathize with or are close to the church.” The report also said that police were videotaping all of the open-air masses and using spies and undercover agents to infiltrate Roman Catholic groups.²⁹⁸

The friendly relations between most Protestant churches and the Castro government facilitated the creation of the *Consejo de Iglesias Cubanas*, Cuban Council of Churches, which has permission to transmit religious services over radio and television.²⁹⁹ The Baptist church does not belong to the council, and in the past some of its lay activists have been critical of the government and been punished. For example, on December 20, 1994, Miguel Angel León García, a lay pastor of the Baptist Church in San Fernando de Camarones in Camagüey province, and Jorge Luis Brito Rodríguez, a member of that church, were convicted of “enemy propaganda” and given six-year sentences.³⁰⁰

The Cuban government requires churches and other religious groups to register with the provincial registry of associations to obtain official recognition. The government prohibits, with some exceptions, the construction of new churches, forcing many growing congregations to violate the law and meet in private homes. Government harassment of private houses of worship is constant, with evangelical Christian denominations reporting evictions from, and bulldozing of, houses used for these purposes which the government calls *casas cultos*.³⁰¹ On May 25, 1995, Pastor Orson Vila Santoyo, a Pentecostal minister in Camagüey province was arrested for refusing to cease holding religious services in his home. He was convicted of “illicit association” and sentenced to 18 months in prison.³⁰² The mass closures of private houses of worship and the imprisonment of Pastor Vila indicates the Cuban government is increasingly anxious about the growing popularity of evangelical Christianity. In 1996, the government warned religious leaders in Havana that they would impose fines from \$550 to \$2,800, imprison leaders and withdraw official recognition from the religious denomination itself

²⁹⁸ Rohter, Larry. “Pope’s Visit Sets Off Bickering in Cuba,” *New York Times*, 23 October 1997. Tamayo, Juan O. “Report: Cuba Puts Pressure on Papal Visit,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 8 October 1997). Tamayo, Juan O. “New Restrictions Put Cuban Church ‘On a Ration Card’,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 18 October 1997). *Associated Press* (New York: 7 October 1997).

²⁹⁹ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands. March 1996), p. 39-40.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch/Americas. “*Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 19.

³⁰¹ U.S. Department of State. “Cuba,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1997), p. 421-422.

³⁰² Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Cuba: Improvement Without Reform* (New York: October 1995), p. 20.

unless private houses of worship were closed.³⁰³ In mid-1996, there were reports that an evangelical pastor and a Protestant minister had been “banished” to their home provinces.³⁰⁴

Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists have suffered greatly under the Castro government for their religious beliefs. The Pax Christi Netherlands delegation, following its visit in July-August 1995, reported that, “[t]he government continues using the Penal Code to persecute Jehovah’s Witnesses and Adventists,” for their refusal on religious grounds to accept obligatory military service or participate in state organizations. The delegation reported that the government regards them as “active religious enemies of the revolution,” and that they are kept under watch and seriously harassed by the CDRs and other mass organizations.³⁰⁵ The U.S. Department of State reported that in 1996 the government relaxed restrictions on members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, authorizing small assemblies and the publishing of their *Watchtower* magazine.³⁰⁶

An independent Cuban press dispatch reported the arrest in Havana on July 25, 1997, of two brothers, Fidel and José Castriles Rodríguez, who belonged to an organization called *Fraternidad Cristiana*, Christian Fraternity. State Security agents searched their home, saying they were looking for “enemy propaganda.” As of July 30, 1997, they were still in detention. The dispatch did not say which Christian denomination Christian Fraternity was affiliated with, but reported that it had links with an organization called the International Fraternity of Businessmen of the Complete Gospel.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ U.S. Department of State. “Cuba,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1997), p. 421-422.

³⁰⁴ Tamayo, Juan O. “Banishment Wears Down Cuban Dissidents,” *Miami Herald* (Miami: 5 September 1996).

³⁰⁵ Pax Christi Netherlands. *Cuba: The Reality Behind the Symbol* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: March 1996), p. 21.

³⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State. “Cuba,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1997), p. 421-422.

³⁰⁷ Mercedes Moreno, “Members of Religious Group Detained,” *Agencia Nueva Prensa*, ANP (Havana: 30 July 1997) - as reported on *CubaNet*, 5 August 1997, <http://www.cubanet.org/oldies.html>.

APPENDIX I

CONCILIO CUBANO MEMBERSHIP NOVEMBER 1995

At the end of November 1995, the Miami-based *Grupo de Apoyo a Concilio Cubano* (GACC), *Concilio Cubano* Support Group, issued the following list of 101 groups belonging to the *Concilio Cubano*, and the name of the principal representative of each group at that time. It should be emphasized that this is not a definitive membership list, as at least 30 more groups joined the *Concilio Cubano* between November 1995 and the crackdown by the Cuban government that began in February 1996. The next membership list did not appear until August 1996, after the crackdown had taken a significant toll on the organization (See Appendix III). The list as it appears here is alphabetized according to the name of each group. Originally, this list was alphabetized according to the name of each group's representative. The list as it first appeared can be found on the Free Cuba Foundation web site at:

<http://www.fiu.edu/~fcf/conciliocubano.html>.

When searching for a particular group, it should be remembered that some parts of a group's name may be dropped in common parlance or in media accounts. For example, the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes Por la Democracia*, Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy, is often referred to simply as *Jóvenes Por la Democracia*. Also, spellings of people's names are not necessarily exact, due in large part to the difficulties Cuban dissidents and independent journalists experience in transmitting information between themselves and with the world outside Cuba.

Alerta Verde Grupo Ecológico - Raúl Pimental.

Alianza Democrática Popular - Mercedes Paradas Antúnez.

Alianza Liberal Democrática Cubana - Pedro Brito Hernández.

Asociación Cívica Democrática - Aida Rosa Jiménez Rodríguez.

Asociación Cubana de Ingenieros - Orfilio García Quesada.

Asociación de Jóvenes Demócratas - Ernesto Ibar Alonso.

Asociación de Lucha Frente a la Injusticia Nacional - Reinaldo Alfaro García.

Asociación de Trabajadores Independientes de la Salud - Danelis García González.

Asociación de Trabajadores Por Cuenta Propia - Ismael Salazar Agüero.

Asociación Humanitaria Seguidores de Cristo Rey - Isabel del Pino Sotolongo.

Asociación Martiana Libertad, Igualdad y Fraternidad - Alfonso Cabrera La Rosa.

Asociación Pro Arte Libre y Concertación Democrática Cubana - Gladys González Noy.

Asociación Pro Democracia Constitucional - Félix Fleyta Posada.

Atención a Presos Políticos - Roberto Hernández Morales.

Bloque Democrático José Martí - Eugenio Rodríguez Chaple.

Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba - Yndamiro Restano Díaz.

Centro de Derechos Humanos de Santiago de Cuba - Nicolás M. Rosario Rosabal.

Centro No Gubernamental José de la Luz y Caballero Para los Derechos Humanos y la Cultura de Paz - Lorenzo Páez Núñez.

Coalición Democrática Cubana - Reinaldo E. Cosano Alén.

Colegio Médico Independiente - Hilda Molina Morejón.

Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional - Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz.

Comisión de Derechos Humanos José Martí - Amador Hernández Blanco.

Comisión Humanitaria de Ayuda a Prisioneros Políticos - Agustín Jesús Acosta Moya.

Comité Cubano de Opositores Pacíficos Independientes - Victoria "Vicki" Ruíz Labrit.

Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos - Gustavo Arcos Bergnes.

Comité de Ayuda Humanitaria a Presos Políticos de Santiago de Cuba - Jorge H. Alfonso Aguilar.

Comité Julio Sanguil Frente Unido Democrático Camagüey—Ciego de Avila - Reinaldo Rivero Milián.

Comité Martiano Por los Derechos del Hombre - Clara Ortíz González.

Comité por Paz, Progreso y Libertad - Alberto Perera Martínez.

Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba - Juan G. Martínez Guillén.

Consejo Médico Cubano Independiente - Jesús Ramón Marante Pozo.

Consejo Nacional de Derechos Civiles - Jorge Omar Lorenzo Pimienta.

Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos - Pedro Pablo Alvarez.

Coordinadora Camagüeyana - Francis Campanería Peña.

Corriente Agramontista - René Gómez Manzano.

Corriente Cívica Cubana - Félix A. Bonne Carcacés.

Corriente Liberal Cubana - Juan José López Díaz.

Corriente Socialista Democrática - Vladimiro Roca.

CubaPress - Raúl Rivero.

El Derecho Cubano - Belkis R. Hidalgo Hernández.

Foro Feminista - Deysi (or Daisy) Carcasés Valle.

Frente Cívico de Mujeres Martianas, Villa Clara - Mérida Pérez Fuente.

Frente de Unidad Nacional - José Antonio Fornaris Ramos.

Frente Democrático Calixto García - Pedro Hechevarría Alarcón.

Frente Democrático Oriental - María A. Escobedo Yaser.

Frente Femenino Humanitario - Gladys Linares Blanco.

Frente Pro Derechos Humanos Máximo Gómez - José Angel Chente Herrera.

Frente Sindicalista Oriental Independiente - Raúl Morel Castillo.

Fundación Cívica Cubana - Orlando Pérez Pineda.

Grupo Independiente Minas, Sierra de Cubitas - Manuel E. Valido Gutiérrez.

Grupo No. 5 Camagüey - Félix Santana Rodríguez.

Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes - Beatriz Marta Roque.

Instituto de la Opinión Pública - Jorge Bacallao Pérez.

Liga Cívica Martiana - Miguel Angel Aldana Ruíz.

Movimiento Agenda Nacionalista - Irene Almira Ramírez.

Movimiento Amor Cristiano - Félix Perera González.

Movimiento Armonía - Rogelio Fabio Hurtado.

Movimiento Cristiano Liberación - Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas.

Movimiento de Derechos Humanos de Camagüey - Jabib Jabib Jalil.

Movimiento de Jóvenes Por la Democracia - Néstor Rodríguez Lovaina.

Movimiento de Madres Cubanas Por la Solidaridad - Mercedes Parada Antuñez.

Movimiento Democracia y Paz Oriente - Jorge L. Rodríguez González.

Movimiento Democrático Científico - Juan Rafael Fernández.

Movimiento Democrático José Martí - A. Yonasky Hechevarría.

Movimiento Ecologista y Pacifista Naturpaz - Leonel Morejón Almagro.

Movimiento Ignacio Agramonte, Camagüey - José García Reyes.

Movimiento Liberal Democrático - Héctor Fernando Maceda Gutiérrez.

Movimiento Libertad y Democracia - Miguel Eumelio Sánchez Valiente.

Movimiento Maceísta Por la Dignidad - Isidro Herrera Castillo.

Movimiento Nacionalista Democrático Máximo Gómez - Cancio Chan Aguilé.

Movimiento Opositor Pacífico Panchito Gómez Toro - Secundino Costa Valdés.

Movimiento Pacifista 5 de Agosto - Orlando Morejón Bitón.

Movimiento Pacifista Por la Democracia - Nancy Gutiérrez Pérez.

Movimiento Pacifista Por la Liberación - Tony Azoy.

Movimiento Pacifista, Solidaridad y Paz - Miguel A. Palenque Loveiro.

Movimiento Patria, Independencia y Libertad - Ramón Palma Rosell.

Movimiento Reflexión - Librado Linares García.

Movimiento Vicente García, Las Tunas - Roberto Socorro Salgado.

Oficina de Información de Derechos Humanos - Aida Valdés Santana.

Organización Juvenil Martiana - Luis Felipe Lorens Nodal.

Organización Opositora "20 de Mayo" - Celso Ledesma Cordero.

Partido Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos - Ricardo Cruz González.

Partido Demócrata Cristiano - María Valdés Rosado.

Partido Demócrata Martiano - Juan Francisco Monzón Oviedo.

Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre Frank País - Osmel Lugo Gutiérrez.

Partido Pro Derechos Humanos de Cuba - Odilia Collazo Valdés.

Partido Pro Derechos Humanos Independiente - Lázaro González Valdés.

Partido Renovación Democrática - Jorge Adrián Ayala Corzo.

Partido Social Cristiano, Camagüey - Aurelio Sánchez Salazar.

Partido Solidaridad Democrático - Héctor Palacio Ruíz.

Proyecto Cristiano Por los Derechos Humanos y Sindicales, Santa Clara - Juan Antonio Valdés Fundora.

Sociedad Ecologista Cuba Verde - José Antonio Ramos Guerra.

Sociedad Política de La Habana - Carlos M. Ríos.

Unión Cívica Nacional - Omar del Pozo Marrero.

Unión de Ex-Presos Políticos Ignacio Agramonte - Reiler Ramírez Muñíz.

Unión de Ex-Presos Políticos, Camagüey - Marcelino Soto Caballero.

Unión de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Cubanos - Ibrahín Carillo Fernández.

Unión Democrática Martiana - Ernesto Pablo Ramón Domínguez.

Unión Nacional Cubana - Carlos Prades.

Unión Patriótica Cristiana Independiente - Evaristo Pérez Rodríguez.

Unión Sindical Caballeros del Trabajo - Javier Troncoso Aguilar.

APPENDIX II
CONCILIO CUBANO STRUCTURE:
FEBRUARY 1996³⁰⁸

Secretariado Nacional/National Secretariat:

Delegado Nacional/National Delegate: Leonel Morejón Almagro

Vice-Delegados/Deputy National Delegates:

Reinaldo Cosano Alén
Lázaro González Valdés
Héctor Palacio Ruiz
Mercedes Paradas Antuñuz

Miembros honorario/Honorary Members:

Gustavo Arcos Bergnes
Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas
Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz

Consejo Coordinador Nacional (CNN)/National Coordinating Council:

Made up of 26 members, two each elected by each of the 13 commissions established in different regions of the country.

Grupo de Apoyo/Support Group (also known as the Grupo de los Siete/Group of Seven):

Gustavo Arcos Bergnes
Félix Bonne Carcacés
René Gómez Manzano
Vladimiro Roca Antúnez
Marta Beatriz Roque
Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz
Jesús Yañez Pelletier

³⁰⁸ As provided by Amnesty International, *Cuba: Government Crackdown on Dissent* (London: AMR 25/14/96), April 1996), p. 25.

APPENDIX III
CONCILIO CUBANO MEMBERSHIP:
AUGUST 1996

In August 1996, the *Concilio Cubano* issued a second, somewhat reduced list of its member groups, following the crackdown by the Cuban government that began in February 1996. The list was distributed abroad by the Miami-based *Grupo de Apoyo a Concilio Cubano* (GACC), *Concilio Cubano* Support Group, and the groups were listed in no particular order. It has been alphabetized here according to the name of each member group. The list as it originally appeared can be found on the GACC web site at:

<http://www.ccsi.com/~ams/concilio/org&repe.html>.

When searching for a particular group, it should be remembered that some parts of a group's name may be dropped in common parlance or in media accounts. For example, the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes Por la Democracia*, Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy, is often referred to simply as *Jóvenes Por la Democracia*. Also, spellings of people's name are not necessarily exact, due in large part to the difficulties Cuban dissidents and independent journalists experience in transmitting information between themselves and with the world outside Cuba.

Agencia de Prensa Independiente de Cuba - Manuel David Orrio.

Alianza de Trabajadores Demócrata Cristianos de Cuba - María Elena Argote González.

Alianza Democrática Popular - Zoírís Aguilar Calleja.

Alianza Liberal Democrática - Pedro J. Brito Hernández.

Alianza Patriótica Cubana - Horacio Casanova.

Asociación Cívica "Félix Varela" - José M. Acosta Miyes.

Asociación Cívica Democrática - Antonio Durán Urgeyéz and Aida Rosa Jiménez Rodríguez.

Asociación de Jóvenes Demócratas - Ernesto Ival Alonso.

Asociación de Lucha Frente a la Injusticia Nacional - Reynaldo Faro García.

Asociación Defensora de los Derechos Políticos - Zoírís Aguilar Calleja.

Asociación Humanitaria de Seguidores de Cristo Rey - Isabel del Pino Sotolongo.

Asociación Independiente de Ayuda Humanitaria - Nancy de Varona Díaz.

Asociación Pro Arte Libre Independiente - Fernando Sánchez López.

Asociación Pro Democracia Constitucional - Ingeniero José Martínez Puí.

Bloque Democrático “José Martí” - Orlando Morejón Vitón.

Centro de Estudios Alternativos - Heriberto Leyva Rodríguez.

Centro Independiente de Derechos Humanos, Santiago de Cuba - Nicolás Rosario Rosabal.

Centro No Gubernamental de Derechos Humanos y Cultura de Paz “José de la Luz y Caballero” - Lorenzo Páez Nuñez.

Coalición Democrática Cubana - Reynaldo Cosano Alén.

Colegio de Ingenieros y Arquitectos de Cuba - Orfilio García Quesada.

Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional - Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz.

Comisión Humanitaria de Ayuda al Preso Político - Agustín J. Arcos Amoya.

Comité Cubano de Opositores Pacíficos - Victoria “Vicky” Ruíz Labrit.

Comité de Apoyo a la Democracia “Abraham Lincoln” - Enrique Aponte Costa.

Comité Martiano por los Derechos del Hombre - Lara E. Ortíz González.

Comité por Paz, Progreso y Libertad - Alberto Perera Martínez.

Consejo Nacional por los Derechos Civiles en Cuba - Jorge Omar Lázaro Pimienta.

Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos (CUTC) - Pedro Pablo Alvarez Ramos.

Convención Martiana para la Unificación Nacional - Blanca Rosa Toledo Rodríguez.

Convención Martiana para la Unificación Nacional - Lázaro Santana Mezquía.

Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos - Antonio Durán Urgeyéz.

Coordinadora de Presos Políticos - Aida Valdés Santana.

Corriente Agramontista - Jorge Bacallao Pérez.

Corriente Liberal Cubana - Juan José López Díaz.

Corriente Socialista Democrática - Manuel Cuesta Morúa.

CubaPress - Raúl Rivero Castañeda.

Foro de Estudios Históricos - Manuel Fernández Rocha.

Frente de Unidad Nacional - José Antonio Fornaris.

Frente Femenino Humanitario - Gladys Linares Blanco.

Instituto de la Opinión Pública - Jorge Bacallao Pérez.

Liga Cívica Martiana - Miguel Angel Aldana Ruíz.

Movimiento “13 de Julio” - Arnaldo de Varona Díaz.

Movimiento “13 de Julio” Mártires del Remolcador - Magdalena Pérez.

Movimiento “8 de Septiembre” - Rolando Hernández Martínez.

Movimiento “Ignacio Agramontes” - José García Reyes.

Movimiento 24 de Febrero - Mario Remedios.

Movimiento Amor Cristiano - Félix Perera González.

Movimiento Armonía - Rómulo Michelena Pérez.

Movimiento Cristiano Amor y Pax - Sara Franco Leemook.

Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia - Heriberto Leyva Rodríguez.

Movimiento Cubano Reflexión, Camajuaní - Librado Linares García.

Movimiento de Madres Cubanas por la Solidaridad - Aida Rosa Jiménez Rodríguez.

Movimiento Demócrata Científico - Juan Rafael Fernández Pellegrín.

Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano - María Valdés Rosado.

Movimiento Humanitario “Mariana Grajales” - Gema Romero Yparraguirre.

Movimiento Independiente de Estudios Martianos - Roberto Larramendi Estrada.

Movimiento Liberal Democrático - Héctor S. Maceda Gutiérrez.

Movimiento Maceísta por la Dignidad Nacional - Isidro Herrera Carrillo and Pedro Alberto Rodríguez.

Movimiento Pacifista por la Democracia - Nancy Gutiérrez Pérez.

Movimiento Pacifista, Solidaridad y Paz - Miguel Andrés Palenque Lobeiro.

Oficina de Información de Derechos Humanos - Aida Valdés Santana.

Opositor Pacífico “Panchito Gómez Toro” - Secundino Costa Valdés.

Organización Juvenil Martiana - Luis Felipe Lorens Nodal.

Organización Opositora “20 de Mayo” - Celso Ledezma Cordero.

Partido Acción Nacionalista - Aguileo Cancio Chong.

Partido Demócrata Cristiano - María Valdés Rosado.

Partido Democrático “30 de Noviembre” Frank País - Maritza Lugo Fernández.

Partido Liberal Democrático - Rafael Santiago Montes.

Partido por la Libertad - Antonio R. Afoy Quintana.

Partido Pro Derechos Humanos de Cuba - Odilia Collazo Valdés.

Partido Renovación Democrática Cubana - Jorge Adrián Ayala Corzo.

Partido Social Cristiano, Camagüey - Aurelio Sánchez Salazar.

Partido Social Demócrata Cubana - Vladimiro Roca.

Sociedad de Ecologistas “Cuba Verde” - Armando Javier Alonso Romero.

Sociedad Política de La Habana “Cambio 2000” - Carlos M. Rivas.

Unión Cívica Nacional - Estévan Pérez Castillo.

*Unión de Activistas del Comité Pro Derechos Humanos, Golfo de Guancanayabo -
Mirtha Aleida López Chávez.*

Unión de Jóvenes Democráticos de Cuba - Raúl Rojas Pérez.

Unión Nacional Cubana - Carlos Enrique Prades Herrera.

Unión Patriótica Democrática Sindicalista Independiente - Ibraín Carrillo Fernández.

Unión Sindical Independiente de Cuba - Lázaro Cuesta Collazo.

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Those readers who are looking for a reference to a specific group or organization should consult the Index and Appendices I and II. It should be emphasized, however, that if the group in question is not mentioned in this report, it does not mean that group does not or has not at some time existed. When searching for references to a particular group, it should be kept in mind that some parts of a group's name may be dropped in common parlance or in media accounts. For example, the *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy, is often referred to simply as *Jóvenes por la Democracia*. Also, spellings of places and of people's names are not necessarily rendered exactly, due in large part to the difficulties Cuban dissidents and independent journalists experience in transmitting information between themselves and with the world outside Cuba. For example, one source spells a prison in Granma province as La Manga and another source spells it, Las Mangas. In those cases in which names are presented with somewhat different spellings by different sources but appear to be referring to the same place or person, all spellings are included in the Index and the names are cross-referenced.

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