

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
PRESS RELEASE**

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**Cuba: Human Rights Day crackdown on dissidents likely after month of mass arrests**

Cuban human rights activists are at increased risk of detention or harassment from the authorities amid demonstrations on International Human Rights Day, 10 December, said Amnesty International following a wave of almost 1,500 arbitrary arrests in just over a month.

Yesterday, police in the capital Havana arbitrarily restricted the movement of members of the prominent Ladies in White (*Damas de Blanco*) group of activists as they prepared for today's demonstrations. This came after at least 1,477 politically motivated detentions in November 2015, the highest monthly total in many years, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN).

"For weeks on end, the Cuban authorities have used a spike in arrests and harassment to prevent human rights activists and dissidents from protesting peacefully. This is a systematic problem that silences Cuban activists in their own streets. For years, harassment on Human Rights Day has been the rule rather than the exception, and is absolutely unacceptable," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

The Ladies in White and other organizations have been convening activists to march today, in Havana and elsewhere, in support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to exercise their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

The group and their supporters have held regular Sunday marches for more than 30 consecutive weeks to call for the release of Cuban political prisoners and human rights protection. These peaceful demonstrations have been met with a pattern of arbitrary arrests and other harassment by the authorities.

The pro-democracy group Patriotic Union of Cuba (*Unión Patriótica de Cuba*, UNPACU) has also reported mass detentions of its members across the country in recent months.

In a bid to curtail the protests, frequently the arrested activists have been driven to remote areas where they are left to walk home, or they have been detained for anywhere from one to 30 hours.

Cuban human rights activists say this year has been marked not only by a high number of arrests, but also increased violence from state authorities towards peaceful political dissidents and activists.

"The Cuban authorities must refrain from dispersing, arresting or detaining peaceful protesters," said Erika Guevara-Rosas.

"Cubans' right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly must be respected on Human Rights Day and throughout the year."

**Background**

In the mid 1990's Amnesty International began to document a shift away from high numbers of long-term political detentions in Cuba to increased use of short-term arbitrary arrests, harassment of activists, political dissidents, human rights activists and independent journalists.

The number of politically motivated detentions has progressively increased in recent years, according to the CCDHRN.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions typically peak during official visits or summits. In September 2015, the month of Pope Francis' high-profile visit to Cuba, the CCDHRN registered 882 such arrests, compared with an average of 700 arbitrary detentions per month in 2014. Many of those detained are held between one and 30 hours. Some activists report excessive use of force by the police.

Cuban political activists and human rights activists are often accused, but not formally charged, under articles of the Cuban Penal Code as a way to curb legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. Provisions often invoked include insult or contempt of a public official ("*desacato*"), resistance to public officials carrying out their duties ("*resistencia*"), and "*desórdenes públicos*," which criminalizes any large meeting or act in public spaces which aims to provoke panic or disturbance.

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