

PRESS RELEASE

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Cuba: Government must release journalist and prisoner of conscience Roberto Quiñones Haces

Mexico City - The Cuban government must immediately and unconditionally release Cuban prisoner of conscience and independent journalist Roberto Quiñones Haces, demanded the organizations ARTICLE 19, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and Amnesty International today.

Quiñones, aged 63, was tried in 2019 and sentenced to one year's imprisonment for "resistance" and "disobedience" because of his work as an independent journalist.

"Roberto Quiñones' conviction is not only one more example of the censorship faced by independent journalists in Cuba, but also shows how it is used to generate fear among those defending freedom of expression in the country and threatens the right to seek and receive information freely. No journalist should have to choose between silence or jail. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Roberto Quiñones", the organizations said.

In April 2019, Quiñones reported for the online newspaper *Cubanet News* on a trial at the Guantánamo Municipal Court of a couple, two evangelical pastors, who had decided to home school their children. According to the journalist, the National Police detained him and beat him. Consequently, he filed a formal complaint against the police officers. Roberto Quiñones also alleges that he was arbitrarily detained on previous occasions, as far back as 2015.

In August 2019, Roberto Quiñones was found guilty of "resistance" and "disobedience" and sentenced to one year in prison. On 23 August, an appeals court confirmed his conviction, without granting him a new oral hearing. On 11 September 2019, Roberto Quiñones was arrested in Cienfuegos, Cuba; he has remained in prison ever since.

For decades, Amnesty International has documented how provisions of the Cuban Penal Code, such as "resistance" and "disobedience", have been used to stifle freedom of expression in Cuba. The imprisonment of Roberto Quiñones is another example of a long-standing policy that has continued under the administration of President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

While imprisoned, Roberto Quiñones has developed gastrointestinal, respiratory and other health complications related to pre-existing conditions, according to his family. Quiñones has also written about the conditions in which he is held, including the overcrowding, poor quality of food and water and the lack of adequate medical care, for which he was punished by the Guantánamo Municipal Prison Disciplinary Council with a ban on any further writing, according to statements that emerged in the press and were gathered by ARTICLE 19. These health factors increase the potential risks posed by COVID-19.

In 2020, in the context of World Press Freedom Day and amid warnings about the effects of COVID-19, ARTICLE19, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Amnesty International issued [an open letter](#) to the President of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Quiñones. The Cuban authorities have not responded to this request.

“Instead of trying to justify the conviction of an independent journalist like Roberto Quiñones for peacefully exercising his profession, the Cuban government must take concrete measures to protect freedom of expression and the press, as repeatedly requested by the Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN, as well as other states in the context of Cuba’s most recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) before the Human Rights Council,” said the organizations.

The demand for Roberto Quiñones’ immediate and unconditional release is made against a background of multiple concerns regarding alleged restrictions imposed on independent journalists in the context of COVID-19 and of Decree-Law 370, which, according to reports, appears to extend the Cuban government’s network of control and censorship of the digital space, potentially undermining freedom of expression.

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