

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA ADVISORY**

Cuba at a human rights crossroads as Pope Francis prepares to visit the country

Experts available for interview

Cuba is at a human rights crossroads, with important advances such as the recent release of political prisoners and a number of positive reforms to its migration laws overshadowed by the government's determination to deploy new methods to stifle dissent, said Amnesty International ahead of a state visit by Pope Francis.

"Over the past few months, we have seen unprecedented openness when it comes to Cuba's international relations. However, the country still needs to make progress when it comes to allowing people to peacefully express their views without fear of being harassed, detained or attacked," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

Over the past few years, authorities in Cuba have switched from a strategy of incarcerating people viewed as political dissidents for long periods of time to consecutive short term arrests and public smear campaigns.

According to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional), there were 768 "politically" motivated detentions in August 2015 alone – up from 674 in July 2015.

"If the Cuban authorities are serious about instigating real changes, they must show openness not only with other governments but also with independent human rights monitoring bodies, such as Amnesty International and UN Special Procedures on human rights, who have been banned from the country for years," said Erika Guevara-Rosas.

Amnesty International has not been allowed to enter Cuba since its last visit in 1988 when a delegation from the organization went to document the situation of prisoners of conscience and other individuals who were detained for political reasons across the country.

The organization also said the US embargo on Cuba is highly detrimental to Cubans' enjoyment of a range of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to food, health and sanitation and called on the US government to lift it.

Pope Francis is due to make his first visit to Cuba between 19 and 22 September.

For more information about the human rights situation in Cuba, see [ADD LINK TO FACT SHEET](#)

Ends/