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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Il Cenacolo, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The deteriorating human rights situation in Cuba

Il Cenacolo is deeply concerned by the worsening human rights situation in Cuba.

Cuban women, members of the Ladies in White, continue to be regularly detained and physically assaulted when they exercise their right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression marching for the release of all political prisoners, and the respect for human rights.

The Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported in June 2018 that there were 120 identified political prisoners in Cuba with some the longest serving in the Western Hemisphere. Twenty one of them have served between 15 and 27 years in prison. There are new prisoners of conscience being added to that list today in Cuba. Here we will focus on two cases.

Dr Ariel Ruiz Urquiola, a former university professor and an environmental activist, was arrested on May 3, 2018 and sentenced in Cuba to one-year imprisonment for contempt when he asked two forest rangers to show him their identification. The officials left the area and later in the evening three police officers came with a warrant, arrested and took Ariel to the police Station in Viñales. On May 8, 2018 he was sentenced to one year in prison by the Municipal Court of Viñales. It is important to recall that the Cuban legal system is not independent but subordinate to the legislative and executive branches that both under the rule of Raul Castro, head of the Cuban Communist Party. Omara Urquiola, sister of Ariel, informed Amnesty International "that prison officials threatened her to stop speaking with the international press or they would suspend Ariel's visits and communication with his family." Following a hunger and thirst strike and international scrutiny, Ariel was released with an extra-penal license and his legal status remains unclear.

Eduardo Cardet Concepción is a Cuban physician, human rights defender, and national coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL). He joined the MCL then headed by Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas in the early 2000s. Eduardo was an active participant in various MCL initiatives aimed at achieving a nonviolent transition to democracy in Cuba. He was a manager of the Varela Project, the Heredia Project, The Peoples Path and One Cuban, One Vote. Cardet held various responsibilities within the organization and was a member of the movement's coordinating council.

Following the extrajudicial killing of Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero on July 22, 2012, the Christian Liberation Movement restructured its leadership and Eduardo Cardet was appointed national coordinator of the movement in November of 2014.

Due to his opposition activity Eduardo Cardet has been arbitrarily detained on several occasions. The last time he was taken prisoner by the Cuban political police was on November 30, 2016, shortly after the death of Fidel Castro. The MCL has denounced that on that occasion he was also badly beaten by Castro's state security agents. The beatings continued following his arrest in the detention center.

On January 31, 2017 Amnesty International issued an urgent action and recognized Eduardo Cardet as a prisoner of conscience. Despite this status and the call for his immediate release, Cardet was sentenced to three years in prison on March 20, 2017 following a show trial in Cuba.

Nine months later he was badly beaten, struck in the head, and stabbed twice by prisoners in the stomach with a sharp object on December 19, 2017 in what appears to have been a politically motivated attack engineered by prison officials.

Members of the Christian Liberation Movement, on April 5, 2018, attempted to turn in a petition signed by 10,000 Cubans and they were detained for 24 hours and the signatures seized by the political police. There are fears that those who signed will be persecuted.

Prison officials suspended visits for six months and his family denounced the measure. Yaimaris Vecino, the wife of Eduardo Cardet protested:

"Today, May 26, [2018] we went to the prison in Cuba Si, it was the visit that Eduardo's mother, his sister, my children and I scheduled, and they prevented us from seeing him, the prison authorities alleging that Eduardo has given 'false information' that according to them, the family is spreading and in retaliation suspended visits for six months."

Yaimaris went on to say that *"this is a new arbitrariness against Eduardo and I seriously fear for his physical integrity."*

Eduardo was last able to speak with his family on July 28, 2018 over the phone. On August 15, 2018 it was learned that Eduardo Cardet would not be able to make or receive calls during two months. This is an additional punishment on top of the six month prohibition of family visits.

Eduardo Cardet Concepción was born in Holguín, Cuba on October 25, 1968. He is married to Yaimaris Vecino with two young children, worked as a family doctor at the health center in the town of Velasco in Holguín province.

Il Cenacolo would like to call attention to the harassment, death threats, and attacks carried out against Sirley Avila Leon by government agents. The violence escalated until on May 24, 2015 Osmany Carrión attacked her with a machete severing her left hand, nearly severing her right arm, and cutting into her knees leaving her to die. Lack of adequate medical treatment left her a complete invalid, and she had to leave to Miami on March 8, 2016 to obtain medical care and regain the ability to walk. She returned to Cuba six months later on September 7, 2016 to find her home occupied, her attacker free and still threatening to harm her, and within hours a camera and microphone were placed on a post across the street from her mother's home. Death threats intensified and Sirley Avila Leon fled Cuba and requested political asylum on October 28, 2016.

Il Cenacolo is also deeply worried by Cuba's downplaying of racism in the island. The UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN-CERD) met in Geneva on August 15, 2018 to examine racism in Cuba. The Cuban government representative testified before the Committee that "racial discrimination is not a generalized problem in Cuba, there has been just one complaint of discrimination. Measures were taken: the perpetrator was sanctioned and the victim seemed satisfied. There are very few isolated cases." The government also claimed that there are no racial majorities or minorities despite recognizing that 64% of Cubans identify as white and 9% as black.

Meanwhile human rights defenders Juan Antonio Madrazo and Norberto Mesa, both of whom are Cubans of African descent, who were to attend the same UN-CERD session were detained arbitrarily and banned by the Cuban government from traveling there to address the question of racism in Cuba.

Finally, the Cuban government told the UN-CERD that human rights defenders in Cuba face no limitations to exercise their activities. The diplomats assured that there have been no reprisals or harassment of activists. Sadly, the facts say otherwise.
