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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Centrist Democratic International (CDI), 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.

[15 February 2010]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Situation of Cuban political prisoners requires attention

Centrist Democratic International is deeply concerned by reports it has received from the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs of Cuba with regards to the human rights situation in Cuba in general; the situation in the prisons and the plight of prisoners of conscience Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Ariel Sigler Amaya, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, Librado Linares García, Jorge Luis González Tanquero, José Luis García Paneque, Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso and Normando Hernández González. The Centrist Democratic International draws attention to these eight cases, while recalling that there are hundreds of political prisoners, because the lives of these eight persons are in jeopardy.

Librado Linares García suffers from bilateral epitheliopathy which has led to blindness in his left eye and he is beginning to lose site in the right. He suffers from alkaline reflux erythematous gastritis which he developed following surgery for a stomach ulcer that collapsed more than half of this organ. They removed more than 40% of his intestines along with a portion of the duodenum and dysplastic cells were found present. Librado also suffers from arthritis, pulmonary emphysema, fatty liver, and synovitis in one knee. He is suffering from seborrheic dermatitis on his head, and pharyngitis. His family has requested a medical parole but has not received a response from the authorities.

Normando Hernández González is an independent journalist with the School of Independent Journalists of Camagüey arrested in the March 2003 crackdown and sentenced to 25 years in prison for writing articles and essays critical of the Cuban government. He is serving his sentence at Kilo 7 prison in Camagüey. Normando is an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience and his health while in prison has been greatly impacted. Normando suffers from chronic nonspecific colitis, chronic gastritis erythematousus, gastrointestinal malabsorption syndrome, which causes him geardiasis flattening of the villi, duodenitis eritematoza, jejunitis chronic infiltration and Giardia cysts in the bladder, bowel and irritable bowel syndrome. Due to the poor diet and the gastrointestinal malabsorption syndrome he suffers from vitamin deficiency, is malnourished, suffers constant headaches. He has two compressed vertebrae in the cervical spine. Normando suffers severe hypertension, and he has suffered vision loss. The Mantoux test for TB completed within the first months of 2007 gave hyper-reactive (14) despite having been treated against tuberculin. Normando also suffers from dizziness, nausea, poor appetite, suffers from episodes of diarrhea interrupted by episodes of constipation. He can not absorb nutrients and is emaciated. His wife has made a formal request to grant him a medical parole so that he can obtain treatment, but no answer from the authorities.

Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta is serving a 20-year prison sentence since March 2003 at the Provincial Prison of Holguín serving a 20-year prison sentence for his activities in the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy arrested in the March 2003 crackdown and sentenced to long prison terms for engaging in civic activism. He is an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. Poor prison conditions has led to severe deterioration of Juan Carlos's health he is suffering from Ischemic heart disease with blockage, heart murmur, hypertension, osteoarthritis, cervical sacrolumbagia, prolapsed pyloric duodenal, gastritis, bronchial asthma, allergy, kidney and liver problems, second-degree hypertensive retinopathy, suffers from immunodeficiency, scars from hemorrhagic dengue fever which has suffered twice, malnourished, vitiligo with depigmentation of the skin, dermatitis, and hiatal hernia & a herniated disc and chronic gastro duodenitis. In an effort to obtain medical attention he has been driven to the extreme act of cutting his legs on more than one occasion in an attempt to obtain medical attention.

Ariel Sigler Amaya, member of the Independent Alternative Option Movement, arrested during the March 2003 crackdown sentenced to 20 years in prison before being hospitalized at the Julito Díaz Hospital in Havana he was being held at the Ariza Provincial Prison in Cienfuegos. Poor prison conditions, the lack of proper nutrition and medical treatment have generated numerous illnesses causing Ariel to develop "advanced malnutrition" and weaken him to the point that he can no longer walk. In a letter that reached his brother Juan Francisco the Amnesty International prisoner of conscience states: "I have infinite desires to continue to live and recover to keep fighting for my country. I love life and will fight to keep living. Therefore, never do anything against my health or any action that violates my life. If something like this happens, from this moment to accuse the Cuban State Security (...) specialized in inducing disease, delaying treatment for purposes of aggravating diseases and prepare alleged suicides and deaths." (...) "The same ones who yesterday repressed and imprisoned me are the ones who have brought me to the brink of death, and made of me a small pile of bones and skin. Everyone is well aware of cases like mine, of robust persons, physically strong and in excellent health, that with the monstrous methods of state security have died in prisons, hospitals and psychiatric centers. Ariel's mother Gloria died of a stroke on Friday, January 8, 2010 and prison authorities allowed Ariel to attend the wake. Extremely emaciated and wheelchair bound he was barely recognizable, and has led to protests and demonstrations for his release out of fear that he will not survive. Another brother of Ariel Sigler, Guido is also a prisoner of conscience serving 20 years in prison.

64 deaths documented, while human rights defenders were only able to monitor 26 of Cuba's more than 250 prisons, caused by the conditions in the prison, physical and psychological torture, beatings, solitary confinement, mistreatment, starvation, poor medical attention and general negligence. The number of deaths reported is a partial number. Negligence and lack of medical attention is not confined to the prisons. The deaths of 42 patients at the Mazorra National Psychiatric Hospital due to malnutrition and exposure at the beginning of January 2010 are cause for great concern.

Cuban prisoners live in an extremely precarious state the International Committee of the Red Cross last visited the prisons over 20 years ago and what is equally troubling is that was its first visit since 1959. Whereas the Cuban government signed the protocols for civil and political and social and economic rights in 2008 they have yet to ratify them. Furthermore the Special Rapporteur on Torture's visit planned for 2009 has been delayed. The Centrist Democratic is hopeful that the visit will take place in 2010 and that the Rapporteur will have full access.

In 2009 according to the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs of Cuba there were over one thousand (1,000) cases of political arrests and other acts of repression. Documenting and reporting human rights violations in Cuba carries a heavy price in 2009 sixty (60) human rights defenders were tried and imprisoned while many more suffered harassment and repression.

The president of the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs of Cuba, Juan Carlos González Leiva, is also a victim of government harassment and repression. Human Rights Watch has reported on how:

Cuban authorities have repeatedly threatened to force Juan Carlos González Leiva and his wife and fellow rights defender Tania Maceda Guerra to leave Havana and move elsewhere on the island. The authorities have pressed for the move under a draconian law that restricts freedom of movement. [...] González Leiva and Maceda Guerra have lived in Havana since May 2007, when they were granted permission to live with and care for a blind friend. Under a law known as Decree 217, all Cuban citizens from outside of Havana must obtain government permission before moving to the capital. In November 2009, the government denied the couple's application to renew their temporary residence status in Havana, where they are still living with

their blind friend. [...] González Leiva and Maceda Guerra have also been the victims of death threats and public acts of repudiation. Over the past several months, the email account of their organization has been hacked into and terminated, their movements monitored, and their family members threatened, González Leiva told Human Rights Watch¹

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders reported the intimidation and harassment of Mr. Sergio Díaz Larrastegui another member of the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs of Cuba describing how he was threatened by State Security agents in November of 2008 to throw out other Council activists living in his home onto the street or “suffer the consequences.” He refused and was fired from work on January 9, 2009 his computer was seized by State Security. Council members are under constant surveillance and their mail is regularly intercepted.²

On December 10, 2009, the Ladies in White [female relatives of Cuban political prisoners and human rights defenders lobbying for their loved one’s freedom] were beaten and manhandled before the eyes of the international press and diplomatic corps in Havana. Additionally, there were five (5) violent attacks against Cuban citizens in central Havana in less than one month, in four (4) of which, victims received furious beatings from the political police and mobs they organized.

¹ Human Rights Watch Cuba: Stop Harassing Human Rights Defender and Family Authorities Threaten Enforced Relocation Under Draconian Law January 27, 2010
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/01/27/cuba-stop-harassing-human-rights-defender-and-family>
² <http://www.omct.org/pdf.php?lang=es&articleId=9045&type=print&PHPSESSID=5>