

URGENT ACTION

PEACEFUL PROTESTORS TARGETED IN HAVANA

Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), a group of women relatives and friends of prisoners detained during a major crackdown on government critics in March 2003, plan to protest on 2 May through the streets of the Cuban capital, Havana to call for the release of their relatives. Amnesty International believes they are at risk of harassment and intimidation.

Damas de Blanco have carried out a weekly march every Sunday since they formed in 2003. The group march through the streets of Havana, starting at the Santa Rita Church, where they attend mass. Although the group reported harassment and intimidation in the past, they have stated that during the last few weeks, harassment by government supporters, the police and state security officials has increased. During their weekly marches, government supporters have amassed to shout insults and police and state security officials have broken up some marches by force.

At the beginning of April, state security officials visited around 30 members of Damas de Blanco at their homes in Havana to inform them of new regulations applying to their Sunday marches. They are now required to apply for authorisation from the police at least 72 hours before each march. The marches must be limited to only five blocks within Havana and there are restrictions on the number of supporters allowed to march in solidarity with them. This was the first time Damas de Blanco were made aware of such regulations and the officials failed to notify them in writing of the regulations. Damas de Blanco have rejected the legitimacy of these restrictions and refuse to comply with them as they see them as unreasonable and an attempt by the authorities to prevent them from expressing their views and continuing with their peaceful activities.

Following the imposition of these new regulations, it has become increasingly difficult for the Damas de Blanco to march on Sundays. On Sunday 25 April, only six members of Damas de Blanco were allowed through a police check point to reach the Santa Rita Church. When they started to march after the mass they were confronted by two police officers and a state security official who reminded them of the new regulations and their lack of a permit to march. The Damas de Blanco ignored this warning and continued with their march. They were soon surrounded by dozens of government supporters who started to intimidate them by shouting insults and making noise with cooking pots and banging hoes. The Damas de Blanco were penned in and not able to move for almost eight hours until police officials intervened and took them home.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to cease immediately the harassment and intimidation of the Damas de Blanco and any other citizens who seek to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- Calling on the authorities to permit the Damas de Blanco to march peacefully on Sundays without unreasonable restrictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 JUNE 2010 TO:

Head of State and Government

Raúl Castro Ruz Presidente

La Habana, Cuba

Fax: +53 7 8333085 (via Foreign

Ministry); +1 2127791697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

Email: cuba@un.int (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)

Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Interior Minister

General Abelardo Coloma Ibarra

Ministro del Interior y Prisiones

Ministerio del Interior, Plaza de la

Revolución, La Habana, Cuba

Fax: +53 7 8333085 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

+1 2127791697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2003, over several days, the Cuban authorities arrested 75 men and women for their peaceful expression of critical opinions of the government. They were subjected to summary trials and were sentenced to long prison terms of up to 28 years. Amnesty International declared the 75 convicted dissidents to be prisoners of conscience, 53 of them remain in prison.

Damas de Blanco organize peaceful marches where they distribute flowers and call for the release of their relatives and friends. In 2005, Damas de Blanco was awarded The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament.

In March 2010 Damas de Blanco organized a daily march for a week to mark the seventh anniversary of the arrest of their relatives. On 17 of March 2010, their march was forcibly broken up by Cuban police, who briefly detained several women. Some of the women claimed that they were beaten by the police. They included Reyna Tamayo, mother of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a prisoner of conscience who died on 22 February 2010, having spent several weeks on hunger strike whilst in prison.

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