




# After the Black Spring

*For Cuban journalists, prison, liberation, and the new repression*



A special report of the Committee to Protect Journalists



COVER: Spouses and loved ones of Cuban political prisoners formed the group Ladies in White to draw attention to the plight of detainees. At a 2011 protest, the Ladies hold a photo of political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who died in custody.  
AP/JAVIER GALEANO

RIGHT: Cuban security agents forcibly disperse a 2010 Ladies in White protest in Havana.  
AP/JAVIER GALEANO

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*For Cuban journalists, prison, liberation, and the new repression*



*A Special Report of the Committee to Protect Journalists*

Issued September 2011

**CPJ** Defending Journalists Worldwide



Founded in 1981, the Committee to Protect Journalists responds to attacks on the press worldwide. CPJ documents hundreds of cases every year and takes action on behalf of journalists and news organizations without regard to political ideology. To maintain its independence, CPJ accepts no government funding. CPJ is funded entirely by private contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

*After the Black Spring*  
*For Cuban journalists, prison, liberation, and the new repression*

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RIGHT: The Castros loom large over Cuban society. A young woman carries their portrait during a 2011 May Day event.  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Freedom finally came for the journalists unjustly jailed in the Black Spring crackdown of 2003. But that shameful era has given way to a period of significant, ongoing repression.*

By Carlos Lauría

In the Black Spring of 2003, twenty-nine independent journalists were jailed for the crime of free expression. These reporters and editors were placed in filthy, sunlight-deprived, rodent-infested dungeons hundreds of miles from their families. They were subjected to beatings, humiliation, and psychological pressure. They were fed rotten food and denied adequate medical care. The Castro regime had long trampled on the internationally recognized right to free expression, but this mass imprisonment of journalists and dozens of dissidents was the beginning of an especially shameful era.

Today, after years of intensive international advocacy and negotiation, all of the journalists have been set free. Most were released as a result of a July 2010 agreement between the government of President Raúl Castro and the Catholic Church, a deal assisted by Spanish diplomatic efforts.

We're relieved that Cuban jails have been emptied of journalists, but the anachronistic and repressive legal framework that allowed the Castro regime to imprison journalists is still very much in place. As CPJ's Karen Phillips describes in this report, the release of journalists and other political prisoners reflected a Cuban government effort to sanitize its international image. It was not accompanied by any improvement in press freedom or human rights policies.

After facing years of international condemnation, the Cuban government came to understand that the jailing of critics for long prison terms was taking a high toll on its reputation abroad, particularly in Europe. But its repressive approach toward dissent is fundamentally unchanged. Our analysis has found that Cuban state security agents continue to engage in systematic harassment of independent reporters. Arbitrary arrests, short-term detentions, beatings, smear campaigns, surveillance, and social sanctions persist as key parts of a government strategy to stifle critical news and opinion. While gov-

ernment tactics are lower in profile, Cuba's repression is ongoing and significant.

It was in March 2003 that the United States invaded Iraq, a move that dominated the attention of governments and international institutions around the world. At CPJ, we were preparing for what would become the most lethal conflict for the press in memory. It was precisely then, when the world's attention was focused on Iraq, that Fidel Castro began an all-out assault against dissent and the independent press. Authorities swept up independent journalists in a swift, two-day crackdown. Within weeks, those arrested were convicted in summary, closed-door trials on charges of engaging in antistate activities, and they were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 14 to 27 years.

The crackdown was stunning in its scope. The detainees included both renowned writers such as Raúl Rivero and local journalists who covered the daily issues ignored by official Cuban news media; all were accused of being mercenaries in the service of foreign powers, namely the United States. Unlike past practices, in which authorities were satisfied with harassing and threatening independent journalists and their families, the official reprisal this time was immense. About one-third of the island's independent press corps was thrust into jail.

And thus began a years-long global advocacy effort that encompassed dozens of human rights and press freedom organizations, along with many hundreds of journalists, poets, authors, and intellectuals appalled at the injustice of the Black Spring and intent on freeing those wrongly held. CPJ began issuing a stream of statements, letters, and news alerts that condemned the Cuban government's actions and called for the immediate release of all jailed reporters. We created a special section on CPJ's website that included capsule reports on all imprisoned Cuban

**The release of the Black Spring detainees is a significant milestone. But access to information is still an unattainable luxury for most Cubans.**



Weeks after the Black Spring crackdown, Blanca Reyes holds a photo of her detained husband, the writer Raúl Rivero.  
AP/CRISTOBAL HERRERA

journalists. We brought the plight of independent journalists and their families to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and our Journalist Assistance program responded with material support. In July 2003, CPJ commissioned Peruvian investigative reporter Gustavo Gorriti to travel to Havana to convey our deep concern and express solidarity with our colleagues. Gorriti also produced an in-depth report that detailed the dire conditions facing the journalists and their families.

But our advocacy crashed against an intransigent regime that had shielded itself from international criticism. So we enlisted intellectuals to the campaign; many of them had supported or sympathized with Cuban ideals over the years but were dismayed by the Castros' brutal tactics. On the first anniversary of the Black Spring, we organized a campaign in which 600 journalists, writers, and intellectuals appealed to Havana for the release of jailed journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal, recipient of CPJ's 2003 International Press Freedom Award, and the 28 other imprisoned Cuban journalists. Vázquez Portal, freed three months later, said support from Latin American journalists and CPJ had been the catalysts for his release.

A handful of others were released over the years, but our frustration over Cuba's reluctance to free the bulk of those imprisoned grew. The lack of engagement by Latin American countries and the unilateral approach of the United States made it impossible to promote a profound debate on human rights violations in Cuba. And while Raúl Castro talked of economic reform after assuming power in 2006, he maintained the same system of repression as that pursued under his brother Fidel.

Spain appeared to be one of the only countries able to negotiate effectively with Cuba over the release of dissidents, so CPJ engaged in talks with the government of President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. We met with Prince Felipe, senior Spanish officials, legislators, and members of the news media. In 2008, for the fifth anniversary of the crackdown, we went to Madrid to release another investigative report on the inhumane imprison-

ments. The Spanish connection proved instrumental. Spanish diplomats assisted the Catholic Church in Cuba in negotiating the release of the remaining imprisoned journalists and the dozens of other political detainees.

Soon after the July 2010 agreement was announced, authorities began freeing the jailed journalists, six at first, then one or two at a time over the next nine months. Most were forced to leave the island in exchange for their freedom. The journalists were flown to Spain along with their families, who were given just hours to say their goodbyes and pack a few belongings. As CPJ's Borja Bergareche recounts, they face great economic and professional challenges in exile.

But they have continued to tell their own stories and those of their beloved island. On the CPJ Blog, we have been publishing a series of first-person columns written by the newly freed reporters. Their stories—a riveting journey through the despair of solitary confinement, the horror of torture, the loneliness of exile, and the triumph of the human spirit—are republished as part of this report.

Our efforts are inspired by the courage of these independent journalists and the unwavering devotion of their loved ones, people such as the formerly jailed editor Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, a recipient of the CPJ International Press Freedom Award, and his wife, Laura Pollán Toledo, leader of the Ladies in White, a group that campaigned exhaustively for the release of their spouses and loved ones.

The release of these unjustly jailed writers and editors after years of suffering and humiliation is a significant milestone. But as this report shows, independent reporting is still being punished with jail in Cuba. Reporters and bloggers are intimidated, threatened, and put under constant surveillance. Access to information and the Internet is still an unattainable luxury for most Cubans.

There is much work to be done. The Black Spring is over, but the sunlit season in which Cubans freely express themselves has yet to arrive. ■

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*Carlos Lauría is CPJ's senior program coordinator for the Americas.*

# Cuba's New Repression

*When the last of 29 journalists jailed in a notorious 2003 crackdown was finally freed this year, it signaled to many the end of a dark era. But Cuban authorities are still persecuting independent journalists through arbitrary arrests, beatings, and intimidation.*

By Karen Phillips

**J**uan González Febles, director of the independent news website *Primavera Digital*, was running an errand last spring when he came upon a news story: Police were climbing onto his neighbors' roofs in Havana to remove satellite television dishes that the government considers illegal because they pick up uncensored stations from abroad.

When Febles started taking pictures with his cell phone, officers quickly arrested him and took him to a neighborhood police station, where he was held for seven hours and made to erase all of his photos of the dish seizures, a highly unpopular police activity. Febles, a former librarian who took up independent journalism in 1998 and now runs the overseas-hosted website, told CPJ that he has become accustomed to detentions, which number in the dozens over the years, but that he is still bothered that his phone is tapped and that he's followed by security agents in the streets. The agents sometimes stop him, Febles said, and relay what they've heard in his private phone conversations.

Such is the state of repression in Cuba today. As President Raúl Castro's government seeks greater international engagement, it has freed in the last year more than 20 imprisoned independent journalists and numerous other political detainees who had been held since the notorious Black Spring crackdown of 2003. Government officials talk of political and economic reform, pointing to a plan to introduce high-speed Internet service to the island in 2011. But though the government has changed tactics in suppressing independent news and opinion, it has not abandoned repressive practices intended to stifle the free flow of information.

A CPJ investigation has found that the government persists in aggressively persecuting critical journalists with methods that include arbitrary arrests, short-term detentions, beatings, smear campaigns, surveillance, and

social sanctions. Today's tactics have yet to attract widespread international attention because they are lower in profile than the Black Spring crackdown, but the government's oppressive actions are ongoing and significant.

CPJ examined government activities in March and April 2011, two months with sensitive political milestones, and found that journalists were targeted in more than 50 instances of repression. The majority of cases involved arrests by state security agents or police officers, according to CPJ research and documentation by the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation and Hablemos Press, a news agency that focuses on human rights. Most frequently, these journalists were detained on their way to cover a demonstration or political event and were held in local police stations for hours or days. In at least 11 cases, the arrests were carried out with violence, CPJ research shows.

During this period, more than a dozen journalists endured house arrest, preventing them from reporting on the Communist Party Congress in April and the eighth anniversary in March of the Black Spring crackdown that led to the imprisonment of dozens of journalists and dissidents. Although no journalists have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms in the last year, Cuban authorities in May ominously sentenced six political dissidents to prison sentences of two to five years.

"Political repression in Cuba has undergone a metamorphosis," said Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz, president of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation. "Before, repression was based on long prison sentences. Although the Cuban government still subjects dissidents to jail terms, it has changed substantially from the Black Spring, which was characterized by long-term sentences." More typical now, he said, "are many arrests by the political police, lasting hours, days, or weeks."





Febles, in back, and colleague Luis Cino work in the makeshift newsroom of *Primavera Digital*.  
COURTESY FEBLES

## The arrival of high-speed Internet will do little to improve free expression initially. The project targets only the relatively few, officially approved Internet connections.

Perhaps counterintuitively, the scheduled arrival of broadband Internet is not expected to improve free expression or access to information. Because the project will improve the island's relatively few existing Internet connections—which are predominantly in government offices, universities, and other officially approved locations—but not extend connectivity to the general public, the government and its legion of online bloggers will gain an even greater technological advantage over critical voices. Independent journalists will be forced to continue to use expensive Internet access at hotels, pirated connections bought on the black market, or the politically tinged access offered at foreign embassies.

“Official bloggers already benefit from free or low-cost Internet connections,” said Laritza Diversent, a lawyer and an independent blogger. “Now, they will have the advantage of a high-speed connection as well.”

**M**agaly Norvis Suárez, a correspondent with Hablemos Press, has been detained three times this year by police and state security agents. On one occasion, she was slapped and kicked by police officers. Another time, officers took her ID card and held it for several days, essentially condemning her to house arrest because the law requires individuals to carry identification in public. During one detention, security agents told her that if she continued to practice journalism, she could be imprisoned and lose custody of her children. Her 15-year-old daughter was harassed so relentlessly at school that she dropped out.

Speaking with CPJ from Havana, Norvis Suárez said the psychological impact is significant. “It’s very difficult

to work under the threat of imprisonment,” she said, “wondering if I’m imprisoned, what will happen to my family, my husband, my house.” Talk of political reform aside, the laws that have allowed Cuba to imprison reporters remain very much in place. They are written in Article 91 of the penal code, which imposes lengthy prison sentences or death for those who act against “the independence or the territorial integrity of the state,” and Law 88 for the Protection of Cuba’s National Independence and Economy, which imposes up to 20 years in prison for committing acts “aimed at subverting the internal order of the nation and destroying its political, economic, and social system.”

This restrictive legal framework applies to the flow of news and information itself. All authorized domestic news media are controlled by the Communist Party, which recognizes freedom of the press only “in accordance with the goals of the socialist society.” Domestic news outlets are state-owned and supervised by the Communist Party’s Department of Revolutionary Orientation. Online information is restricted by an inter-ministry commission charged with “regulating the information that comes from worldwide information webs.” Article 19 of Resolution 179 of 2008 of the Ministry of Communication and Computing states that Internet service providers are obligated to “adopt the necessary measures to impede access to sites with content that is contrary to social interest, ethics, and good customs; as well as the use of applications that affect the integrity and security of the state.”

Independent journalists are forced to operate outside this official framework. News websites such as Hablemos Press and *Primavera Digital* are hosted overseas, with



editors in Cuba uploading articles and updating the sites at embassies or hotels. Other independent journalists file stories, often by email, to news websites such as *Cubanet* and *Diario de Cuba* that are based and edited overseas, often by Cuban exiles. Still other independent journalists operate their own blogs, which are hosted overseas and updated through embassies or costly hotel connections.

Independent journalists pay another high price: They continue to be subjected to “acts of repudiation,” the term for rallies at which government supporters gather outside the homes of people perceived as being critical of the state. In extreme cases, journalists and political dissidents are prevented from leaving their homes by chanting crowds of government supporters, as was the case with a large demonstration held on the eighth anniversary of the Black Spring crackdown. Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, a recently

**The struggle for free expression is being waged almost exclusively in digital media. Despite hurdles to online access, Cuba has a vibrant alternative blogosphere.**

freed independent journalist and recipient of the 2008 CPJ International Press Freedom Award, and his wife, Laura Pollán Toledo, a well-known human rights defender, told CPJ that more than 200 pro-government supporters had gathered outside their home. The couple was hosting a gathering of newly freed political prisoners and members of the Ladies in White, a group composed of the former prisoners' spouses and other loved ones. The demonstrators stayed for two days, playing the national anthem and revolutionary songs at high volume from loud speakers and preventing anyone from leaving the gathering.

State television and, increasingly, the Internet have provided platforms for smear campaigns against critical journalists and dissidents. The government proudly announced in February that it had enlisted roughly 1,000 bloggers to denounce critical journalists; many of these “official” bloggers are government employees, and all enjoy easy, low-cost access to official Internet connections.

A slickly produced new television series, “Las Razones de Cuba,” which is also streamed online, presents independent journalists and dissidents as enemies of the state. Using fuzzy footage of “suspicious” activities (such as journalists entering a foreign embassy), a menacing soundtrack, and interviews with official “experts,” the program seeks to portray critics as criminals bent on

toppling the state. Journalist Dagoberto Valdés, who directs the online newsmagazine *Convivencia*, and the prominent blogger Yoani Sánchez have been singled out on the program.

Perhaps surprisingly in a country with few private Internet connections—overall penetration is said to be only about 14 percent—the struggle for free expression is being waged almost exclusively in digital media. Despite the many hurdles to online access, Cuba has a vibrant alternative blogosphere that consists of about 40 critical journalistic blogs, all of which are hosted on overseas servers. Blogs and increasingly Twitter offer platforms not only for reflection, analysis, and reporting, but also for responding to government smears.

In response to “Las Razones de Cuba,” the blogger Sánchez has produced her own talk show, “Las Razones Ciudadanas” which is video-streamed online. In each episode, civil society members discuss topics such as independent journalism. Reinaldo Escobar, a blogger and the husband of Sánchez, noted in one episode that the advent of mobile telephones had transformed independent journalism on the island, allowing witnesses and sources to communicate more easily with journalists and enabling reporters to post content on Twitter. It was only in 2008 that the government allowed consumer sales of personal electronic goods such as mobile phones.

“Twitter is the true protective shield for the independent press and alternative bloggers in Cuba,” said the exiled Cuban journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal, himself a former political prisoner. Still, sending a text or posting a Twitter message from a cell phone is costly, about US\$1 in a country where the average monthly income is equivalent to US\$15 to US\$30. Government supporters have been quick to use Twitter as well. For each Twitter message critical of state policy, there is an onslaught of disparaging messages from pro-government users.

The government has been intent on keeping digital access tilted in its favor. Private Internet connections are rare in Cuba. Resolution 180 of 2003 allows only those with Cuban convertible currency—a monetary form generally used by foreigners—to obtain individual Internet access, which must be approved by the government-owned Internet service provider ETECSA. Government officials, intellectuals with government ties, and some academics and doctors are among the relatively few Cubans with authorized passwords to the state's Internet service.

Cubans without private connections can turn to state-run Internet cafés, but users there can expect identity checks, heavy surveillance, and restrictions on access to non-Cuban sites. The cost of uncensored connections



In Havana, government supporters confront friends and relatives of newly freed detainees during a March 2011 event marking the anniversary of the Black Spring. REUTERS/ENRIQUE DE LA OSA

at hotels is about US\$8 per hour; government-issued Internet passwords can be purchased on black market sites, but they, too, are expensive and are monitored for political content. Many journalists interviewed by CPJ make daily or weekly trips to foreign embassies to use free Internet connections, a practice that puts them under further government scrutiny. Journalists working in the provinces, with few hotels and no embassies, have an even harder time accessing the Web.

A US\$70 million fiber-optic cable project, financed by the Venezuelan government and laid this year by the French company Alcatel-Lucent, is likely to tilt the field even more in the government's direction. The project, scheduled to become operational in July, will increase Internet connection speeds exponentially but will have limited reach, improving existing connections in government offices, universities, and other official sites rather than increasing overall connectivity, according to the official newspaper *Granma*. (The importance the Cuban government attaches to restrictive connectivity was evident in the December 2009 arrest of Alan Gross, a contractor for the U.S. Agency for International Development who is serving a 15-year sentence on charges of illegally helping Cubans set up Internet connections.)

"While the introduction of broadband is potentially a giant step forward for connectivity, if it is implemented under the same rules of control, suspicion, and institutional access it could very well be used as another mechanism of control," said Ted Henken, a Cuba expert and professor of black and Hispanic studies at City University of New York. In April, Henken was detained by state security agents and told he could not return to the island after he had met with independent Cuban bloggers.

**T**he government has been unwilling to turn away from its long-standing suppression of free speech—even as its leaders talk of economic and political change. In fall 2010, President Castro announced plans to reduce the state workforce by more than half a million employees and increase licenses for

private enterprises. By March 2011, about 171,000 new private business licenses had been issued, press reports said, although independent economists told CPJ that high fees and a shortage of raw materials were stifling the effort. During the Communist Party Congress in April, Castro officially replaced his brother Fidel as head of the Communist Party in the first leadership change since the party's founding in 1965. He also announced the introduction of term limits for party officials.

And in March, Cuba released the last of the 29 journalists imprisoned during the Black Spring crackdown, when the government swept up dozens of dissidents and handed them prison sentences of up to 27 years. The release of detainees followed negotiations between the Cuban government and the Catholic Church, with the help of Spanish diplomats. But freedom has not been without a high cost: Most of the freed journalists and their families were forced to leave their homeland for Spain, where their resettlement has been filled with economic and professional challenges. Three jailed journalists who refused to go into exile were released on a form of parole that leaves them vulnerable to re-arrest.

Cuban journalists and human rights defenders expressed great skepticism that economic changes on the island would be accompanied any time soon by improvements in press freedom. The experiences of independent reporter Dania Virgen García bolster that view.

"It seems like just about every two weeks they threaten me, they detain me, or I have to spend the night in jail," said Virgen García, whose reporting appears on her blog and on the Miami-based news website *Cubanet*. "I know every police station in Havana." Virgen García has faced arrest, smear campaigns, and physical assault for her reporting on human rights abuses and substandard prison conditions. Recently she awoke to a group of schoolchildren and teachers shouting pro-Castro slogans and insults outside her home.

In April, while on her way to cover a meeting of ex-political prisoners in Havana, Virgen García was arrested by state security agents and taken to La Lisa police station,



## Cuba's New Repression

she told CPJ in a phone interview. During the ordeal, she said, she was slapped on the face and manhandled by police agents and doused with pepper spray by a prison guard. Virgen García was released six hours later, but suffered extensive bruising and persistent eye inflammation.

If the revolving jailhouse door of low-level repression seems more benign than lengthy prison terms, the death in May of dissident Juan Wilfredo Soto gives one pause. Soto, a member of the Central Opposition Coalition and a former political prisoner, was arrested by two police officers when he refused to leave a public park. After handcuffing Soto, police beat him with batons, according to independent Cuban press reports. Soto was released from custody but died days later from what officials called “multiple organ failure due to pancreatitis,” an assertion met with disbelief by independent journalists and opposition groups. International rights groups and governments called on Cuban authorities to commission an independent inquiry, but Havana did not publicly respond.

Among those calling for an independent investigation was the European Parliament, illustrating the sometimes-conflicting impulses on both sides of the Atlantic. Although the European Union restricted diplomatic relations and development cooperation with Cuba from 2003 to 2008, the EU has since opened a political dialogue with Havana, and the European Commission has provided the island with millions in aid. In 2010, the Commission allocated 20 million euros (US\$28.5 million) for food security, environmental adaptation, and professional and academic exchanges, according to the European External Action Service.

But Havana has yet to secure its most-sought goal with the EU: the undoing of the Common Position, an EU-wide policy adopted in 1996 that conditions full

relations with the island on Havana's progress on human rights and democracy. The repeal of the Common Position would normalize diplomatic relations and solidify development cooperation for the long term. In February, Cuba's minister of foreign affairs, Bruno Rodríguez, met in Brussels with the EU's foreign affairs chief, Catherine Ashton, for the fifth in a series of meetings begun in 2008 to explore the future of EU-Cuba relations. Reiterating Havana's long-held position, Rodríguez said relations should be normalized without “interference in the internal affairs of states,” international press reports said. The intransigence implied by such a statement does not bode well for human rights or press freedom.

“There are a lot of obstacles to normalizing relations at this time,” said Susanne Gratius, an expert on EU-Latin American policy at FRIDE, a Madrid-based foreign policy institute. As obstacles, she cited “the authoritarian nature of the regime, human rights, and political rights, where there has been no change despite the recent economic reforms.” To repeal the Common Position, Gratius noted, consensus would have to be reached among the EU's 27 member states, which have divergent views on Cuba. Sweden, Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic are particularly opposed to abandoning the Common Position on human rights and political grounds.

“It's always the same story: You have some progress, and then you have a step back,” Gratius said of Cuba. “I think in the long run there is a movement toward political opening, but you still have these reversals that come with human rights abuses.” ■

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*Karen Phillips, a freelance writer, has served as CPJ's journalist assistance associate and, most recently, as the research associate for CPJ's Americas program.*



Newly freed journalists appear at a 2010 press conference in Spain. From left are Omar Rodríguez Saludes, Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez, Ricardo González Alfonso, José Luis García Paneque, and Léster Luis González Pentón.  
AFP/DOMINIQUE FAGET



Journalists Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and Fabio Prieto Llorente arrive in Madrid.  
AFP/DANI POZO

## A Tenuous New Home

*Spain has welcomed hundreds of former Cuban detainees and their families. But economic woes and bureaucratic problems have made the transition difficult for exiled Cubans. Many say Spain will be but a temporary stop.*

**By Borja Bergareche**

### MADRID

Spain is host to more than 100 Cuban political prisoners—and hundreds more of their relatives—who were freed as a result of a July 2010 agreement between the Castro regime and the Catholic Church, a deal supported by the Spanish government. Eighteen journalists were among those who agreed to exchange their prison cells for enforced exile in Spain, although four have since moved to other countries. For those journalists still in Spain, the challenges have been significant.

“Until now, we’ve received enough help for housing, public transportation, clothes, and health care,” said Víctor Rolando Arroyo Carmona, an independent journalist who, after being freed in September 2010, lives in Madrid with six family members. “But we live in a legal limbo and cannot find jobs because our work permits have to be renewed every four months, and no potential employer wants to take that risk. There are several other needs—and I am not speaking of luxury—that we can no longer count on, like calling our relatives back in Cuba, having computer equipment with which to write, or traveling to coordinate with other families.”

In interviews with CPJ, most journalists said their basic needs have been addressed through a patchwork of government and private assistance. With health care provided by a national public system, the many journalists who had serious illnesses in prison have had access to basic treatment. School-age children are enrolled in local public schools. An assistance program funded by the Spanish government and channeled through the Red

Cross and other nongovernmental agencies provides a monthly housing benefit of 540 to 740 euros (US\$770 to US\$1,050) and a separate monthly living allocation of up to 850 euros, depending on the number of dependents. Nongovernmental organizations have also provided up to 300 euros in clothing aid. Aid is granted for one year, and is renewable every six months afterward.

“The government is determined to facilitate the integration of released Cubans and their families in Spanish society until they can afford self-sustained lives,” said Juan Carlos Sánchez, general director for Latin America at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

But establishing self-sustained lives has been elusive for many exiled Cubans, who have found great difficulty joining a Spanish labor market battered by three years of economic woes. Spain’s economic growth has ground to a halt and its unemployment rate stands at 20 percent. Thousands of foreign workers who had found jobs in the country in the boom years have now left Spain. Many Cubans have complained that their professional certificates and educational degrees have not been authenticated by Spanish and Cuban authorities, a bureaucratic barrier that is hampering their aspirations to join the workforce.

Spanish officials have resettled the former detainees in a dozen cities and towns across the country, locating most outside Madrid. Some Cuban exiles claim the government undertook nationwide relocations to prevent the emergence of a strong, unified—and diplomatically uncomfortable—political voice hammering the Cuban





José Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernández is among the former detainees who have moved on from their initial home in exile in Spain.  
AP/ALIOSHA MARQUEZ

regime from Spain's capital. Government officials say the relocations were based on a strategy to channel aid through humanitarian groups nationwide. "In order to assist such a large group, the government has signed several covenants with humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross," Sánchez said. "It is these organizations and not the government that decide how assistance is provided, considering the available resources and the fact that those resources are not concentrated in Madrid but across the country, coming mostly from agreements with regional governments."

Before the wave of exiles over the past year, Spain was already home to Cuban writer and journalist Raúl Rivero, who was freed from prison in 2004, and the independent Cuban journalists Alejandro González Raga and José Gabriel Ramón Castillo, who were released in 2008 along with two other Black Spring detainees. Overall, Spain has welcomed at least 120 Cuban dissidents, with several hundred of their relatives. But the country's open-arms approach has been tempered by the economic crisis, which is forcing the central, regional, and local governments to cut spending on all manner of services—including assistance to the exiled Cubans. Several Cubans told CPJ that housing aid had recently been cut.

Last year, the conservative regional government of Madrid, with close ties to Cuban dissidents, took on the responsibility from the central government for those living in the capital and supported them with housing aid, clothes, and school supply subsidies. But forced to adopt austerity measures in response to the economic crisis, even Madrid officials have cut subsidies to Cuban families.

"For the first time, I have not been able to pay my telephone and house bills," said González Raga, an independent Cuban journalist who has lived in Madrid with his wife and two children since his release in February 2008. He said only his daughter-in-law was able to find work, and that was just a short-term stint in a restaurant. González Raga and his wife, Bertha, an accountant, have

been looking for jobs for more than two years. He and a group of other dissidents tried to establish an organization to monitor human rights in Cuba, but initial offers of public funding evaporated. "I am worried for many of those who arrived since July 2010," he said.

The Spanish government has granted asylum to 53 Cubans, including dissidents and their relatives, and is considering six other applications, according to figures provided to parliament in June by Juan Antonio Yáñez-Barnuevo, deputy foreign affairs minister for Latin America. Nearly 400 other Cubans have been granted "subsidiary protection," according to his figures, a legal status that offers permanent residency and work permits but presents fewer obstacles if the exiled Cubans decided to return to their homeland.

Three of the journalists freed in the deal between Cuba and the Catholic Church—Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, Iván Hernández Carrillo, and Pedro Argüelles Morán—refused to leave the island. Released on a form of parole that leaves them vulnerable to re-arrest, the three face the prospect of ongoing harassment at home. But those who chose exile face their own uncertain future.

Among the journalists exiled to Spain, José Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernández has since moved to Chile while Omar Ruiz Hernández, Juan Adolfo Fernández Sáinz, and Normando Hernández González have gone on to the United States. Many more have expressed a desire to move to the United States, where authorities have opened a special visa program for Cubans released in the July 2010 agreement that would allow them to become U.S. residents.

For those still in Spain, the lack of economic opportunity could make the country just a way station. Said Arroyo Carmona: "We live with a total uncertainty over our future." ■

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*Borja Bergareche, a Spanish journalist, is CPJ's European consultant.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*CPJ offers these recommendations to the Cuban authorities, international institutions and governments, and the technology and blogging communities.*

### TO THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT

- End the use of detention, physical violence, surveillance, and smear campaigns against independent journalists and bloggers.
- Repeal Article 91 of the penal code and Law 88 for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy, provisions used by the government to unjustly imprison independent journalists and political dissidents.
- As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, fully meet the obligation to allow journalists to work freely and without fear of reprisal.
- Remove all legal barriers to individual Internet access, and allow bloggers to host their sites on Cuban domains.
- With the arrival of high-speed Internet, extend access to the population at large, including journalists and bloggers.
- Eliminate all conditions on the release of journalists detained during the Black Spring. Vacate parole for the newly freed journalists who remain in Cuba. Allow exiled journalists to return to the island without condition.

### TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

#### To the U.N. Human Rights Council

- Hold the Cuban government accountable for its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Urge Cuba to review trial processes and travel permit arrangements to ensure they conform to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- The U.N. special rapporteur on freedom of expression should request authorization to assess the state of freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Cuba and report findings and recommendations.

#### To the European Union

- Press the government to heed its call to grant freedom of information and expression, including Internet access, to all Cubans.
- Urge Cuban authorities to lift conditions on newly released political prisoners so they are indeed free and not vulnerable to re-imprisonment.
- In the evaluation of the Common Position on Cuba, predicate future dialogue with Cuban authorities on substantial and specific improvements. Those improvements should include the implementation of international human rights covenants signed by Cuba, and the granting to all Cubans of freedom of expression and access of information through all media, including the Internet.
- Create a welcome environment throughout the European Union for Cuban dissidents released from prison but forced into exile. Facilitate their access to EU-funded social and training programs.

#### To the Organization of American States

- While Cuba has put aside rejoining the Organization of American States, any future participation in the OAS must ensure that Cuba conform to OAS principles, including the right to freedom of expression and access to information. In the event Cuba joins the OAS, the organization must ensure Cuba's compliance with international freedom of expression standards.



## Recommendations

- All OAS member states should promote a vigorous debate on human rights violations in Cuba, including restrictions to Internet access.
- The OAS rapporteur on freedom of expression should request authorization to assess the state of freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Cuba and report findings and recommendations.

### TO THE TECHNOLOGY AND BLOGGING COMMUNITIES

- Continue to support Cuban bloggers by publicizing their work and linking to their blogs.
- Companies that provide technology infrastructure to Cuba must ensure their work product is not used to restrict freedom of expression. Companies should follow the principles established by the Global Network Initiative, which seeks to ensure that technology companies uphold international freedom of expression standards.
- Support social media applications that are popular in Cuba.

### TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- In accord with the April 2009 directive issued by President Barack Obama, the administration and Congress should allow U.S. companies that commit to Global Network Initiative principles to provide digital support and infrastructure to Cubans. The 2009 directive was intended to increase the free flow of information to the Cuban people and expand communications links between the United States and Cuba.
- Allow U.S. companies to establish fiber-optic cable and satellite telecommunications facilities linking the United States and Cuba.
- Encourage information technology and social media companies to enable Internet chat services in Cuba, as now allowed under U.S. regulations.
- Ensure that U.S. policy is open and transparent in relation to its support for dissidents.



President Castro with his brother Fidel at the April 2011 Communist Party Congress. Security agents prevented independent Cuban journalists from covering party activities.  
AP/JAVIER GALEANO



# Stories of Prison and Liberation

*Twenty-nine Cuban journalists were swept up in a massive crackdown on dissent in March 2003. Most spent more than seven years behind bars for the crime of being independent reporters. Now, finally free, they are telling their stories of mistreatment in prison, injustice in court, challenge in exile, and ultimately the triumph of the human spirit. These columns first appeared as a series on cpj.org, the website of the Committee to Protect Journalists.*



After eight years apart, journalist Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez and his wife, human rights defender Laura Pollán Toledo, are together again.  
AP/FRANKLIN REYES

## UNDER ARREST: THE ORDEAL BEGINS

### Moments before arrest in Cuba

By José Luis García Paneque

**O**n March 18, 2003, I got up early as usual, connected my shortwave radio receiver, and tuned in to a number of radio stations in the south of Florida in search of the day's most important news. As always, the radio interference was brutal and made it hard to hear. Still, I had to make the effort to obtain

even a minimum amount of information that, as an independent journalist, would permit me to counter the official news provided by the regime through our small news agency, Agencia Libertad.

Around 8 a.m., I received an anonymous call warning me that I would be detained in the coming hours and giving no further details. Being accustomed to harassment, threats, and rumors, I didn't consider the warning important, and I continued with my daily routine.

Later on, my wife and I started out to a friend's house to pick up a liter of milk that she had offered to give us for the

children. We had taken our old but ever faithful Jawa motorcycle. When we rounded the first corner, we realized we had company. Another motorcycle, the type used by state security officials, was indiscreetly following us. On the way back, we noticed that our house was also being watched.

With no one to complain to about the surveillance, I saw no other alternative than to continue with my daily routine. I got in touch with some friends and even arranged to do a program later on for Miami-based Radio Martí. Around 5 p.m., some of the agency's reporters showed up for an English course taught by a professor friend of mine, part of our professional development. Minutes later, a number of state security officials banged on my door with a folded-up search warrant that was never turned over to me. I calmly asked them to allow my colleagues and the professor to leave. They agreed to my request, making it clear that I was their sole objective.

The officials began a meticulous search of my entire house, giving special attention to each paper they found, as my wife, my four young children, and I looked on in amazement. When they reached the library, they pulled books randomly from the shelves and dumped them into cardboard boxes, even a most inoffensive geography atlas belonging to my eldest daughter. In the end, in addition to the books, they confiscated a fax machine, a typewriter, a shortwave radio receiver, and a small recorder.

Around 11 p.m., after the search had lasted six hours, they let me know that I was under arrest. Without further explanation, I was taken to the Department of Provincial Police in Las Tunas province and locked up in a dark, dank cell. That was to be the first night of seven years and four months spent in nine different prisons in five different Cuban provinces. While I was in prison, my wife and children left the island for the United States, overburdened and terrorized by their persecution and mistreatment at the hands of the Cuban government.

On July 12, I was deported to Spain following an agreement between the Catholic Church and the Cuban regime and supported by the Spanish government. Today, after three months in exile, I write this story while trying to rebuild my life, reunify my family, divided between two continents, and continue my struggle in the new setting in which I've been placed.

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*A physician by profession, José Luis García Paneque joined the independent news agency Libertad in 1998 after being fired from his job at a hospital in eastern Las Tunas because of his political views. In April 2003, a Cuban court sentenced him to 24 years in prison after he was convicted of acting "against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state."*

Published March 8, 2011

## From a Cuban youth movement, to journalism, to jail

By Alfredo Felipe Fuentes

I joined the political youth movement in 1991. Curiously, what I remember most from that period is how my apprehensions led me to disguise myself with a hat and glasses when traveling from my town of Artemisa to Havana to meet with other activists. These feelings of fear, defenselessness, and even blame are common to those who live in Cuba, stifled by oppression and numbed by endless totalitarian propaganda.

Three years later, in 1994, I joined the independent press when I covered for Radio Martí the Artemisa arrest of opposition members, among them the local hero of days past, Domingo René García Collazo, ex-commander of the Rebel Army, whose rank was given to him in 1959 by the then-venerable leader, Fidel Castro.

This first report was followed by others and, around 1995, a group of activists founded the freedom desk of the Cuban Independent Press Bureau under my direction. Afterward, we created other desks that promoted media, human rights, and union activities in the region. The state security presence in our lives swelled to the point that in the early hours of February 24, 1996, state-equipped paramilitary groups visited my house along with those of other journalists, human rights groups, and unions to intimidate us with terrorist language.

From this date forward, the majority of the city's activists worked together to coordinate press activities with those of the trade unionism and human rights movements. In this context, I took on the task of creating the country's first school for the teaching of these rights. Educating myself from literature provided by the Spanish Embassy and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, I created a manual on which the curriculum was based and founded the Felix Varela Program for Human Rights Education. I gave classes until I was arrested in 2003 and I published (in 1999 and 2001) various reports on the subject in the magazine *Vitral de la Iglesia Catolica* of Pinar del Río.

State security responded to the expansion of my activism, particularly those related to education and the press, with more arbitrary detentions, searches, confiscations, warnings, threats, and, eventually, imprisonments. To suffocate freedom of information and of the press becomes a question of life or death for dictatorships. Accordingly, the regime used Orwellian artifices to falsify the past and distort the present, which is crucial to the manipulation of information and the creation of propaganda. For this rea-

son, Cuba is the only country in the Western hemisphere where foreign newspapers are not available and where Fidel Castro has called journalists “a unit of the revolution.” That is how the despot states it. He knows that repression alone is not enough to conquer the people; instead he must rely on apologetic, incessant, crazy-making, and chauvinist propaganda that acts as a spiritual sleeping pill and is worth more than his army of police officers.

But the creative force of the freedom instinct and the idea of democracy are contagious and won't be contained. This force always overcomes obstacles in its way and, for more than 20 years, Castro has not been alone on the Cuban political stage. A contingent of men and women decided to stand up to him in the realm of the word, the mind, and the spirit, in support of a State of Rights for Cuba. And in spite of the enormous disadvantages and repression, we arrived in March 2003 with much more than before. Then, faced with a powerful discourse on human rights, the Varela Project [which advocated for democratic reforms], the force of the trade unionism, and the fearlessness of the independent press, Castro became angry, got worked up, and committed a serious mistake: the Cuban Black Spring and its extrajudicial summary trials, without warrants or defense, which yielded savage sentences of up to 27 years imprisonment.

And his mistake was so massive that from it, armed with nothing but gladiolas, our magnificent Ladies in White emerged. Castro was then forced to face our wives, who, backed by a formidable international solidarity campaign, dealt the tyrant his most costly and deathly political defeat: He bowed, for the first time, to mounting pressure from the people themselves, from the internal opposition, not from the exterior. Although we had to go into exile, *he had to release us*. This constitutes a unique fact in half a century of communism in Cuba, and becomes the supreme example that can fertilize the social and spiritual womb of our nation.

Faced with the liberating fertility of this paradigm and the social and economic failure of the regime, Castro, looking to reduce internal pressure, found himself forced to “concede” to the people some of the economic rights that for more than 50 years he violated.

In the first days of our imprisonment we were held in State Security general barracks. There, in cells intended for four prisoners, it was so narrow and overcrowded that there was a mere half a square meter per person. These intensely claustrophobic and oppressive quarters, in which the lights were permanently turned on, constituted a psychic torment that was applied to the 36 days prior to being interrogated before the judge.

Under these torturous conditions and deprived of pencil, paper, and a lawyer, it was impossible for me to prepare my defense before the tribunal, where the very

principles of independence and judicial impartiality are lacking anyway.

That is where I more fully understood the terms “defenselessness” and “abuse of power” in that both were employed to sentence me to an unjust and brutal 26 years in jail. And paradoxically, on page 8 of my sentence, I'm described as a “person of good and respectful relations with the rest of the citizens in the social order and lacking criminal antecedents,” an obligatory and cynical acknowledgment that contradicts the brutal sanction which included the torturous “extra” year spent in a minute, damp, windowless punishment cell filled with rats and other creatures, and given horrible nourishment, imposed on someone who was only fulfilling civic duties and exercising his inalienable rights.

I don't know what made me deserving of so much hatred. And I'm unable to express here what I felt in those cells, those tombs. I can, however, and want to unmask those who abuse power, lie, and offend my dignity by accusing me of being a conspirator and mercenary.

After a torturous period in the punishment cells, they integrated me with the general criminal population and together we shared in the risks, the injustice, and the miserable physical conditions of the Cuban prison system.

Despite all this, I should acknowledge that existing within these repressive forces is a growing number of men and women who silently support us and reject the policies of the regime. They, too, can contribute to democratic transformations and the national reconciliation of our people.

And today in exile, when I recall my seven and a half years in prison, writing you with the new perspective of a future in freedom feels like a chimera. From this future, my main objective is to stay faithful to Christian values, to my honor and to my own law: to fight always as the only dignified attitude before life. My objectives, also very beloved, are to work for a free press outlet where I can support democratic ideas in Cuba and elsewhere; and to complete the book of essays I began in prison.

Finally, I'd like to pay my respects to the martyr Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who discovered how to die as an act of rebellion against oppression, and to the heroism of Guillermo Fariñas. They are protagonists, along with the Ladies in White, of the unpublished and forceful victory over Castro.

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*Alfredo Felipe Fuentes, an economist by training, began working for the Cuban independent press in 1991. He was given 26 years in prison in 2003 for violating Article 91 of the Cuban penal code and acting against “the independence or the territorial integrity of the state.”*

Published May 25, 2011



## Being a Cuban journalist: Harassed, repressed, and jailed

By Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona

The president of the tribunal looked to his right and said, “The prosecutor has the floor.” With a serious voice, he pronounced the sentence: “The prosecutor ratifies the request for perpetual imprisonment for the accused, Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona, for acts against the independence and territorial integrity of the country.”

Cuba’s Black Spring had claimed its first victims from the westernmost point of the country. I was among the chosen. My actual offense? Having become an independent journalist. My first journalistic efforts—mainly reports on human rights abuses and articles on social and economic issues—were broadcast by radio stations owned by Cubans in exile. The work environment for journalists was difficult and outdated. Our only tape recorder was from the Soviet era. We depended on outside contributions to obtain paper, pens, batteries, cassettes, and other equipment. A bicycle was our only means of transportation. I still long for the Underwood typewriter I inherited from my father, which the political police confiscated during an inspection of my house, where I also did my journalistic work.

The repressive state apparatus used intimidating and aggressive methods. My family suffered reprisals, such as being dismissed from their jobs, prohibited from pursuing higher education, and even prevented from participating in cultural and sporting events.

In mid-1996, my writing appeared for the first time in the print media, the *Nuevo Herald* newspaper and the magazine *Carta de Cuba*. In the latter, I published an article that gave an economic and social assessment of tobacco cultivation in Pinar del Río. This provoked a violent reaction on behalf of the regime. I was accused of disrespect and assault and sentenced to a year and six months in prison.

I was put in a special cell in the high-security section of the Kilo 5 provincial prison in Pinar del Río. In my cell, I was greeted by Carlos, a highly aggressive, paranoid murderer whose lack of medication made him all the more violent. For six months I lived under ever-increasing stress. As soon as I would fall asleep, Carlos would start his screaming. He even physically assaulted me.

My persistence in sending out accounts of the wretched living conditions and the physical and psychological mistreatment of the prisoners increased my jailers’ animosity toward me. On multiple occasions I was taken

to the dungeon (the hole) where my food and water was limited as additional punishment.

I served my sentence and was released in April 1998. Much had changed. Independent journalism was experiencing a surge. Its practitioners had multiplied, grouping themselves in competing press agencies and spending more resources on equipment and financing, which facilitated their journalistic work. I began a period of intense activity associated with the Journalists and Independent Cuban Writers Union. I published my first articles on *CubaNet* and other agencies outside the country. I continued my radio work and published a regional bulletin called “El Pinareño.” Simultaneously, I established a network of contributors in Pinar del Río, Havana, and Matanzas who provided information.

There were other acts of repression. My telephone line was electrified, disabling my fax machine. Late one night, “unidentified persons” threw glass bottles at my house and my mother’s house. The state television repeatedly broadcast insults about me and my family, implicating my youngest son, who at the time was 6 years old.

I was thrown in jail again, this time for six months, accused of the “serious offense” of giving gifts to poor children on the Three Kings holiday, January 6, 2000.

I resumed my journalistic work upon release. Friends outside the country furnished me with a desktop computer, a mobile phone, and the other means necessary to cover multiple news events at once. The repression grew stronger. My wife lost her job as a professor. My daughter, after completing her studies to be a telephone operator with satisfactory results, never received a job offer.

I centered my reporting on the failings of the regime, principally on the topic of public health, advised by a team of qualified doctors and personnel. We documented cases such as the deaths of newborn babies and their mothers, the result of inadequate medical treatment. We reported on the abominable hospital conditions and the shortage of essential medicines and equipment. I can’t forget the case of Miguel Antonio, a boy who needed a bone marrow transplant and wasn’t given adequate treatment, nourishment, or decent housing. I remember Sessia, a paraplegic girl of 7. I wrote a story about her called “The prince and the beggar.” Both died shortly after I was imprisoned for the third time.

By the onset of 2003, I had already accumulated enough “demerits” for the Cuban regime to consider me one of its top enemies nationwide. On the night of March 18, 2003, as I was returning from an intense day of work in Havana, I was detained just meters from my house. In the early hours of the 19th, heavily armed agents burst into both my home and my mother’s. The searches lasted 12 hours. My family was intimidated, humiliated, and psychologically tortured. All of my work

## I was sent to Kilo 8, a prison nicknamed 'I lost the key' after the never-ending detentions endured by prisoners there.

equipment and other family belongings were seized. For multiple weeks, police agents stood guard outside my house with a single objective: to scare my family.

Those were terrible days, filled with interrogations, physical aggressions, threats, blackmail, and being thrown into very hot or very cold cells. After 17 days, I was judged along with three brothers of the cause. At the same time, 75 innocent men were being sentenced throughout the country.

I was given 26 years in prison and confined to the easternmost point of the country, in the highest-security provincial prison, in the province of Guantánamo.

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*Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona was a journalist for the independent news agency Unión de Periodistas y Escritores de Cuba Independientes in his home province of Pinar del Río when he was handed a 26-year prison sentence for acting "against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state" under Article 91 of the penal code in April 2003.*

Published December 14, 2010

### IN PRISON: TORTURE AND DESPAIR

## For dissidents, prison is the only destination

By Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta

I was born beneath the yoke of a tyranny, now more than 50 years old, in which prison is the only destination for its opponents. I first came across this destination in 1997, when I was sentenced to five years in prison for the alleged crime of committing an outrage "against state security." In Cuba, besides being a journalist, I was the coordinator of the Cuban Youth for Democracy Movement, an organization that defends the many truncated rights within higher learning institutions, such as a university's autonomy. The answer to our demands? Prison.

I spent four years, seven months, and 27 days in total isolation from the world, in addition to the sad record of 43 sutures on my body, resulting from the beast-like nature of my jailers.

Later, in 2003, one of many miserable springs took place. The Castro regime put 75 opposition members, librarians, and independent journalists behind bars. I was among them. Immediately after a summary trial, a judge sentenced me to life in prison. The funniest thing was that, on the same day, one minute before that (farical) court hearing began, I met my state-appointed defense attorney for the first time.

I was sent to Kilo 8, a prison nicknamed "I lost the key" after the never-ending detentions endured by prisoners housed there. Before long, I learned that hope is what's really lost there.

We journalists and other prisoners of conscience were put with highly dangerous criminals—murderers, drug traffickers—and there were even informers to keep an eye on us. We were surrounded by well-nourished colonies of mosquitoes, cockroaches, and rodents. They kept us on a diet devoid of protein and calories. There was no governmental entity to turn to when confronted with the horror of that place; neither the International Red Cross nor the High Commissioner for Human Rights has access.

I sewed my mouth shut, literally, as an act of shame and honor at the same time.

Behind bars, I also saw the spring of 2008 grow dark. On March 12, I received the devastating news that a traffic accident had taken my daughter's life. She was barely 15. Her name was Llanet. Since I was locked up, it had been difficult to be in contact with her and the rest of my family. I was allowed only three visits a year. The prison authorities seized my correspondence and transferred me to different prisons across the island, like a tourist of the Castros' hells, always far from where my family lived.

In one of these detention centers, I shared my confinement with Orlando Zapata Tamayo, the leader of political dissidence in Cuba. When we saw each other for the first time, we dissolved in a sincere embrace, one that transmitted not only yearning but also misery.

His death last February after a long hunger strike left me with an eternal sadness and reminded the world of those Cubans who deny that prison is the only destination.

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*In March 2003, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta was arrested during the massive crackdown on Cuba's dissidents and independent press. A Cuban court sentenced him a month later to 20 years in prison. He arrived in Spain in August 2010.*

Published January 11, 2011

## Trying to forget: Torture haunts a freed journalist

By Normando Hernández González

I long to forget but cannot. To erase from my memory the murmurs of suffering, the plaintive screams of torture, the screeching bars, the unmistakable music of padlocks, the garrulous sentinels...

I try also to forget the dismal silence of those petrified dungeons. The eternally cold nights spent in punishment cells. The rats, the cockroaches, the spiders ... and most of all the swarm of mosquitoes that drained my blood every second of my existence in that hell.

I aspire to sleep soundly, without being jolted awake. I aspire to live like a normal person, without daily visits from prison's ghosts.

I suffer when I see my brother for the cause, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, his lips sewn shut with wire to show his jailers that he prefers to die from starvation than to abandon his principles. I see Juan Carlos's eyes, at the edge of insanity, I see his skin, colorless after the suffering he has endured in the punishment cells. I see Juan Carlos and the anguish overcomes me.

I can no longer bear to see the image of Roberto Ramos Hernández—arrested for robbery—two syringe needles sticking into the dark part of his eyes, or that of him enveloped in a burning foam mattress engulfed in tongues of fire. I don't want to look upon the despair of this man, rendered blind by the negligence of his jailers who provoked his self-assault and then denied him the medical attention he required.

Another man appears to me crying from the pain of his rotting flesh after having injected petroleum into each of his legs. Jorge Ramírez Roja, alias Riquinbili (a motorized bicycle), also makes his way into my hostel room.

This paraplegic, charged with robbery, uses a shaving knife to cut his scalp alongside the place where he had cerebral aneurysm surgery, in an effort to get the medicines and specialized medical care he has been denied for more than six months. Not to mention the many who file through my nightmares each day with their guts open, with wounds on their arms, thighs, and anywhere else they can inflict injury, a tactic to try to gain prison rights established by law and so often violated with brazen impunity.

Neither do I wish to listen to the sad confessions of the torture victims, to see their tears or to feel, in my own flesh, the cold steel handcuffs pressing their wrists

against the bars of their cells. I have even less desire to see them crucified naked on the bars awaiting a cold-water bath at dawn as the mosquitoes stick to their skin and suck, drop by drop, the little blood that is left to warm them.

I detest losing all sensation in my upper and lower limbs, as Amaury Fernández Tamayo—arrested for human trafficking—lost sensation when he was tortured. I detest having my hands cuffed behind my back and attached to my feet, also cuffed, and lying for hours on my side on the cold, damp cell floor while insects and rodents walk all over my garroted body being tortured with the technique known in prison slang as “Little Chair.”

I want to sleep without enduring the pain caused by a rubber cane or tonfa used to bruise or break my skin.

Why does Roberto Rodríguez, a common criminal, visit me drowning in a pool of his own blood, unconscious, moribund, and denouncing the chief of conduct at the Kilo 7 Prison, Lt. Didier Fundora Pérez, who ordered Unit Chief Daniel Primelles Cala to assassinate him? Why won't Roberto let me rest?

I have no desire to taste the burundanga, that main course composed, so they say, of animal guts, but which everyone knows contains skull, brain, and even excrement. The dish's rank odor gives these ingredients away. Nor would I like to taste the flavor of rotten tenca, the fish that resembled a magnet covered with pins when it was served to us.

I don't care to have the sensation of sandpaper scratching my throat when eating the famous cereal composed of God-knows-what for breakfast. It's best not to discuss the soups for that would only insult water with not quenching one's thirst.

My pen is still weak with hunger, with the gut-wrenching pain caused by my 19-day hunger strike.

But the hardest to forget is the suffering of my mother, my wife, and my daughter who, at barely one year of age, bit the scourge of treachery of the limitless cruelty of a communist government, just for being a dissident's daughter.

Help me, my God.

Help me to wipe the slate clean and to rid myself of the passive memory of the past 88 months, to see if I can live.

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*Normando Hernández González was the director of the news agency Colegio de Periodistas Independientes de Camagüey when he was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He was held for many months in an isolation cell at the maximum-security Kilo 7 Prison in his home province of Camagüey.*

Published November 30, 2010

## IN PRISON: WRITING, REPORTING BEHIND BARS

### Finding freedom in a Cuban cell

By Ricardo González Alfonso

There exists a sensual, amorous liaison, almost felt and seen, that binds poetry, journalism, and freedom together. Examples of such affairs abound, their protagonists transcending short-lived fame and bursting into history and onto the pages of encyclopedias. They are the greats, the masters, those worthy of veneration. But intellectual stature is not always required of the protagonists of such liaisons. Sometimes history, written with a lowercase “h,” concedes us the privilege of participating in those passions of ink and paper, as they say, of flesh and blood. The paths are varied. In fact, paradoxically, prison can lead to freedom.

On March 18, 2003, Cuba’s state security forces committed a crime against tolerance and carried out a countrywide raid. They arrested 75 members of our forbidden civil society; 29 of us were independent journalists. The so-called Black Spring had begun. But the government failed in its attempt to silence voices capable of screaming and singing through prison bars and walls, past guards and terror.

I was sentenced to 20 years in prison for practicing journalism outside the control of the state. Days later I was transferred 330 miles (531 kilometers) from where I was staying, and put into Kilo 8, the Camagüey prison known as “I’ve lost the key.”

In this penitentiary I was placed alone in a minuscule cell. In length, the cell was barely longer than my rickety bed, leaving room only for a hole that clumsily provided sanitation services, and a crestfallen pipe that fancied itself a shower. The width of the cell, also stunted, had symbolic value: It was just as wide as a man with outstretched arms.

Nine of us comrades for the cause lived under these conditions, distributed cell by cell along a small hallway, so that we could hear, but not see, one another. This is why I titled my book of poems, written clandestinely in that prison cell, *Men Without Faces*. Some of my accomplices were my very jailers—naturally, without suspecting it or even imagining how the rigor they imposed facilitated the furtive labor of my poetic creation.

During the first three months, we had no electricity, which obliged me to write by day. But since there were

so many bars between the guards and ourselves (for example, I passed through 11 padlocked doors to see visitors), the opening and closing of those large iron doors alerted us to the location of the guards and gave me time to conceal my prohibited verses. I wrote drafts of my poems on a common-sized sheet of paper, but afterward, I transcribed them with tiny letters on slips of paper of just a few centimeters in size, which I hid in my slippers. Then I would burn the originals, disposing of the ashes in that awkward and sanitary hole.

Our cells were inspected three times a week. When they got to mine I would get up (I was always lying down, no space for anything more), put on my slippers—my secret cache—and leave the cell since the two guards and I wouldn’t all fit.

Later I asked my wife to bring me some very thin sheets of paper along with two packages of envelopes for mailing letters. These clear, cellophane packages were sealed with an adhesive that was easy to unstick and reseal again without revealing they had been opened. In one of the envelopes I hid my poems, written in script a bit larger than the originals, occasionally accessing them to revise one or another of the verses. To fool the guards, I roughly scratched open the other package of envelopes so that my jailers wouldn’t discover the ruse of the false seal. When they searched my cell, they inspected only the envelopes in the torn package, believing the package containing my forbidden verses to be pure. When I finished writing the 45 poems in *Men Without Faces*, I needed to find a method to get them out of the prison without arousing suspicions.

I availed myself of a pack of cigarettes, carefully opening the bottom of the cellophane packaging so that the industrial seal was left intact. I extracted half of the tobacco and inserted the rolls of poem-inscribed paper. Afterward, I refilled each cigarette and replaced them from the bottom of the pack. Then I delicately closed the cellophane. All that remained was the visitation inspection. The last frontier.

That day arrived. During the inspection, my lighter, which had a discreet compartment to put who-knows-what, was meticulously examined. On finding it empty, the guards relaxed and were less diligent with the rest of the inspection, overlooking the false seal on the cigarettes. During my wife’s visit, I handed her the pack of cigarettes, and, in a whisper, informed her of the poetic content of each cigarette. Later, she circulated *Men Without Faces* on the Internet. My book of poems would be released by publishing houses in Spain, the U.S., and France.

My audacity had its price. I was sent to a punishment cell, also minute, where the bed was a concrete bench and the floor was carpeted in rodent excrement. For 16



## They could never silence my voice or those of my comrades. We remained faithful in a liaison that binds together poetry, journalism, and freedom.

days in that cell I went on hunger strike, demanding to be treated just as badly as my friends, not worse. Thanks to the international campaign that my wife launched, I was taken out of the punishment cell.

Sometime thereafter, in need of a surgical intervention, I was admitted to the National Prisoners Hospital at the Combinado del Este Prison in Havana. The medical center was less strict, and I managed to write and publish features, articles, a report, some testimonies, and another book of poems, *Human Purposes*.

They could never silence my voice or those of my comrades for the cause. We had remained faithful in that sensual, amorous liaison, almost felt and seen, that binds poetry, journalism, and freedom together.

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*Ricardo González Alfonso, a poet and screenwriter, began reporting for Cuba's independent press in 1995. He founded the award-winning newsmagazine De Cuba and a Havana-based association of journalists, and then worked as a freelance reporter and Cuba correspondent for the Paris-based press freedom group Reporters Without Borders.*

Published November 16, 2010

### I was a reporter in prison

By Juan Adolfo Fernández Sainz

I went to prison for practicing independent journalism in Cuba. As soon as you get there, you must prepare yourself to continue your reporting, to narrate the horrors of the hellhole in which you've been dumped. And Cuban prisons are horrendous.

But the horrors start not one step back in the penal tribunal, not two steps back with the police chief, but three steps back, with the Cuban penal code, which reflects the social decomposition of post-Soviet Cuba. The government's legal response to a wave of robberies (and to a similar wave of political unrest) is to make sentences more severe.

Are they trying to punish the innocent? No, they want to "save the revolution," and since "the end justifies the means," toughness is expected from the police and from prosecutors, who are judged on their ability to quickly resolve cases; and from judges, who grow accustomed to

handing down harsh sentences. In such a way, they get used to tough sentencing as they continue to lose their humanity.

When the accused is a delinquent and he's to be sentenced for a robbery he didn't commit, he accepts it, in acknowledgment of other robberies he did commit.

This was not the case of Orlando Almenares Reyes. Since he and I were both sent to Canaleta Prison in Ciego de Ávila, he sent me a very detailed letter. He had just been sentenced to 30 years imprisonment for the alleged assassination of a state prosecutor in Cienfuegos province.

At first I wavered. I thought that he could be an assassin and that I could be lamentably losing both my time and my future readers. When in prison, your natural instinct is to distrust your sources, especially when they're talking about themselves. I saw him a number of times after that and he kept writing to me. I promised to keep reporting on his case, always insisting that my journalistic duty was to be skeptical and that I should be careful with my language on a case like his.

Months went by and the prisoner told me again and again that he was innocent, that he had never seen the victim, that he didn't even know if he was black or white, tall or short. That he had been accused by an informant who thought he was outside the country, having illegally left Cuba.

Some months later he began to scream that he was innocent during inspection, then to write "DOWN WITH FIDEL" on the walls of his ward, prompting him to be sent to the isolation cell, where he stayed for more than a year. During that time I saw him little, once when he was taken to the doctor. Each time that I managed to speak to him, during the few seconds as he passed, I assured him that while he was in the punishment cell, I would continue to report on his case. In one of these reports, I ventured that I didn't know if I was defending an assassin or an innocent man.

When, in the silence of the early morning hours, I thought seriously about his case, what most tormented me was imagining that someone could be sentenced to 30 years for a crime one didn't commit, and in Cuba this is completely plausible.

If an investigation was called for, the authorities would surely say that this was a tried and confessed assassin. But would that be a reliable investigation? The case dealt with a fellow tribesman, and, as a result, had to be laid to rest. And if no suspect appeared, anyone



would do, so long as an informant had mentioned his name. How many hidden enemies could a state prosecutor have?

I met so many wrongly sentenced inmates, so many convicted on merely an accusation or a tip-off as proof, facing excessive punishments given the size of the robbery—the mentally retarded sentenced to four years for dangerousness for diving into dumpsters to find something to eat or to sell—that I had very legitimate doubts about the Cuban police, the tribunals, and the penal code.

Since Almenares refused to give in and kept making noise, they transferred him to a higher security prison, and I never heard from him again. I continue to believe that he is innocent, but my opinion is worth as much as my neighbor's.

Another case was that of “Piel Canela” (Cinnamon Skin), a homosexual whose skin color won him this song-inspired alias in prison. Before coming to Canaleta, he was a magnificent worker and student. One night, as he was leaving class, two adolescents invited him to have sex. I remember Canela telling me his story. “I’m gay,” he said. “They invited me and I was delighted to accept.”

He was 20. They went to a house that was under construction. There was neither scandal nor violence. I should explain that in Cuba, a couple of boys relieving their sexual urges with a homosexual is not seen as a great offense. But the law is the law.

A woman saw them leave and told the parents. They went to court where the obvious extenuating circumstances were not taken into account, and Canela was sentenced to 30 years for the corruption of minors.

In prison, he enrolled in a nursing course where he was always the best student. He was going to be a great nurse. They revoked his right to study, supposedly for having misbehaved. But Canela is very respectful and disciplined. “Why could it be?” I asked him. His answer was simple: “Maybe the official that sanctioned me is anti-gay.”

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*Juan Adolfo Fernández Saínz, was a correspondent for the independent news agency Patria when he was arrested in 2003. He was given 15 years in prison, of which he served seven under terrible conditions with little medical care and inadequate food before being exiled in Spain. He was among a number of imprisoned journalists who, remarkably, were able to smuggle out news reports, often focusing on human rights abuses, that were published by news outlets worldwide.*

Published April 8, 2011

## FREEDOM: AT LAST, CELL DOORS SWING OPEN

### An unexpected departure: From jail to exile

By Omar Rodríguez Saludes

It was about 4 in the afternoon on July 8 when the official assigned to me at Toledo Prison, where I’d been locked up for nearly five years, came running to get me. He was in such a hurry that that he tripped and almost fell to the ground. “Saludes, we’re going upstairs,” he said, breathless and sweating. He didn’t give me any more details, but I soon found out that he was taking me up to the director’s office where State Security was waiting for me. “They’ve come to talk to me,” I told myself. And they had.

At the chief’s desk sat an agent of the political police. I didn’t recognize his face, but he had the same harshness and arrogance as all members of that repressive body. As soon as I entered the office, the agent signaled me silently to pick up the telephone receiver lying unhooked on the desk.

With countless questions racing through my head, mostly related to my family, I picked up the phone.

“Yes...” I said.

“Is this Omar Rodríguez Saludes?” a female voice asked me.

“Yes,” I responded, laconic and intrigued.

“One moment, please.”

Without delay, a man’s voice came on the line. He identified himself as Orlando Márquez, official spokesman for the Archdiocese of Havana. Márquez hastily told me that Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino wanted to speak with me.

After formal greetings, Ortega Alamino got straight to the point, disclosing the results of negotiations with Cuba’s leader, Raul Castro, that he and Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos had mediated.

Following his summary, Ortega Alamino said that he had included my name among the first five prisoners who would “shortly travel to Spain with their family members.” The cardinal asked if I would accept this proposal.

“I greatly appreciate your concern,” I told him. “But you will understand that I can’t give you an answer now. First, I have to speak with my family, principally with my wife. They also have the right to make a decision.” This was my answer.

## Everyone wanted to send me off with a goodbye. Although punctuated by a question mark, it was the goodbye we had always longed for.

The cardinal assured me that he would immediately contact my wife and that he would make arrangements “with the authorities” for a family visit.

Before saying goodbye, I thanked the cardinal for his efforts in support of 75 prisoners of conscience and of the *Damas de Blanco*, or Ladies in White. I also extended my thanks to Pope John Paul II, who always advocated for our freedom and was always concerned about the Cuban people. The prelate thanked me for my words and bid me goodbye, giving me God’s blessing.

Our conversation had lasted 20 minutes. I was obliged to raise my voice so that the archbishop could hear me. “There’s a problem with the line,” the security agent in the chief’s seat told me sarcastically while jotting down each of my words. To clear up any uncertainties, he asked me point-blank if I wanted to travel to Spain or not. My answer was categorical: “No,” I said. “You know all too well that it has never been my intention to abandon Cuba.” Following a brief exchange, the agent assured me that I would be granted a family visit as soon as possible.

The next day, at 3 in the afternoon, I received a visit from my wife and my eldest son. We were given barely 30 minutes to decide our fates. I explained to my family the difficulties of being deported, which are made worse by arriving at a new destination in a state of complete neglect and disorientation. I asked them to carefully analyze their decision before communicating it to me. In the end, both opted for leaving.

When the visit was over, without wasting any time, five state security agents met with me in the same room. They assured me that I could bring a “reasonable number” of family members to Spain. “They will be able to come back when they wish, but not you,” they told me when I asked if I would be able to return to Cuba whenever I wanted. “You leave for Spain in less than a week,” they announced.

At that point, time sped up. There was scarcely enough time to finalize and coordinate everything. The day after my family’s visit, two soldiers arrived at my bedside to tell me to gather all of my belongings. “Saludes, get everything because you’re leaving. State Security is coming to get you,” they told me. They almost surprised me in the act of writing in the secret diary that I’d kept, cautiously, since my first day in prison, and in which I was able to record the impressions that now fill this page. Minutes before their arrival, I had saved my final notes in the usual hiding place.

The other prisoners congratulated me and kept telling me how happy they were to see me get out. Everyone wanted to send me off with a goodbye, the goodbye we had always longed for next to a seemingly permanent question mark.

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*Omar Rodríguez Saludes, director of the Havana-based independent news agency Nueva Prensa Cubana, was arrested in March 2003 and summarily sentenced in April to 27 years in jail.*

Published December 28, 2010

## Surviving ‘hell’ and ready to fight

By Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez

**O**n March 18, 2003, our people endured one of the worst episodes in Cuba’s history. The peaceable political dissident community, human rights defenders, trade unionists, and independent journalists, along with representatives of the emergent and democratic civil society—74 men and one woman—were the victims of the most absolute, merciless, and cruel government power.

Massive arrests took place: Our property was searched and seized, including technical and literary texts that were needed to do the job of circulating information. We were taken to political police detention centers in the capital and in provincial cities.

Next were the hellish political police interrogations in Villa Marista, state security headquarters. Later on came the summary trials without the slightest semblance of due process. Then we had the absurd judicial requests and the exaggerated sentences based on the alleged offenses. Finally, the convicted innocents were locked up in prisons, far from their home provinces. We were subjected to the worst possible living conditions: isolated in punishment cells, without lighting in the hallways, and kept under the highest possible security within the prison system.

And so began the martyrdom of the victims of the so-called Black Spring of 2003. Seventy-five Cuban freedom fighters began a period of their life that would be overrun with bitter experiences. Eventually, we would

be declared political prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

On March 30, 2003, the wives of the 75 prisoners of conscience started their walks through the streets of Havana. Two months later, on May 22, they were baptized the “Ladies in White.”

Since then, they have endured numerous humiliations, beatings, threats, detentions lasting hours or days, public harassment, and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment orchestrated by the Cuban political police.

Sometime later came the prolonged hunger strike ending in the death of our brother in the fight, Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who demanded that the Cuban government grant immediate and unconditional release to all political prisoners. Guillermo Fariñas, with similar demands, would continue in this line of sacrifice and martyrdom begun on February 24, 2010.

Following our release, the Black Spring journalists, inside and outside of Cuba, have stayed active, organized, and practicing our profession. We are committed only to our duty to be faithful to the information we transmit and to follow the dictates of conscience and those of our suffering homeland.

Despite the numerous efforts and resources employed by the authorities to neutralize us, it's clear they won't succeed. We will not allow them to wipe out independent journalism, so efficient a weapon to fight their campaigns of disinformation, aimed at deceiving the Cuban people and confusing international public opinion.

New generations of communicators—independent journalists, bloggers, Web editors—in growing numbers and with growing professionalism have become a sweeping wave.

The Cuban government has failed in its repeated efforts to eliminate us. The methods they used in March 2003 will no longer apply because those using ideas to battle obscurantism and stagnation now number more than just a few dozen.

Today there are hundreds, and there will soon be thousands, boldly using pens and computers to clear away the fields of nettles, and forging a truth-lit path toward a luminous new dawn filled with songs of life.

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*Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez began working as an independent journalist in 1995 and helped found the independent news agency Grupo de Trabajo Decoro before being given 20 years in prison. Maseda Gutiérrez won CPJ's International Press Freedom Award in 2008. He was released in February 2011, and now lives in Havana.*

Published March 18, 2011

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## A new spring, and a couple's devotion blossoms anew

By Laura Pollán Toledo

When I wake up and sense my husband's body next to mine, I ask myself if I'm dreaming or if it is true that he has returned to our home.

Eight years have passed since 75 Cubans were uprooted from their homes for thinking differently than the governmental discourse and having the courage to express it publicly. So many days and nights of agony and suffering for their parents, wives, children, and grandchildren. So much accumulated pain. But the important thing is that they couldn't uproot our love. Our love gave us the motivation needed to undertake a tenacious and constant fight for the release of our loved ones.

Sometimes they tell us, the Ladies in White, that we are brave women. We disagree: We've simply experienced so much pain and love that, without realizing it, we crossed that line between fear and bravery.

When you love, you believe in what you do. The hundreds of Sundays that Miramar's 5th Avenue has felt our footsteps and heard our voices demanding freedom for the political prisoners, carrying gladiolas, the symbol of love and family, are proof of this. Perseverance has yielded positive fruits, and this year there will be no Black Spring because the cells have opened, liberating the ideas that could never be destroyed and showing that, when you fight for a pure ideal, for true convictions, neither time nor prison bars can defeat them.

Time and adversity changed us; the humiliation, repression, and beatings have forced us to put on iron armor to resist and confront those who would oppress us and make us suffer.

But God gives us strength and fills our hearts with even more love, which we use to seal our bleeding wounds and continue our fight for the freedom of all political prisoners and for a better world, where other families don't have to endure such bitter experiences and where springs are beautiful, filled with colorful and perfumed flowers.

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*Laura Pollán Toledo is the wife of the newly freed Cuban journalist Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez and a leader of the Ladies in White, a group that advocated for the release of their unjustly imprisoned spouses and loved ones.*

Published March 18, 2011

## IN EXILE: GREAT HOPES, GREAT CHALLENGES

### The best day of the last 2,684

By Omar Ruiz Hernández

When I awoke on the morning of July 8, 2010, in the Guamajal Prison in Villa Clara, I couldn't have imagined that five days later I was going to be landing at Barajas International Airport in Spain, accompanied by five of my comrades.

On July 10, we had been taken out of our respective prisons, and, after a rushed medical exam at the National Hospital for Prisoners in Havana, were driven to the José Martí International Airport where, without passing through customs, we were put on a Madrid-bound Air Europa plane with passports in our pockets that read: "Definitive Departure from the Country."

That is how we left Cuba on July 12, between 9 and 9:30 p.m. (Cuban time), without the opportunity to say goodbye to friends or family who were staying in Cuba. We joined the family members who would be traveling with us shortly before boarding the plane.

It was our first embrace outside of a prison and I remember it as the biggest hug I've ever given my wife and young son, the only family that would accompany me into this forced exile.

And so we became the pioneers of the largest release of political prisoners since 1979, although our release was different given the fact that we had to choose between exile and remaining behind bars.

We arrived in Madrid around noon on July 13, a date on which the superstitious would be ill advised to marry or board a plane. Nonetheless, for those of us who had just landed at Barajas airport, it was the best day of the last 2,684 days of our lives.

We had left behind the land of our birth, the beloved friends who had accompanied us spiritually through seven years of captivity and who, like some of our family members, we might never see again. But despite being in a different land, we were free men, and we had also left behind us seven years of dark cells, vexation, humiliation, malnutrition, nights of insomnia, and sudden jolts—every horror of prison, made worse by the lack of motive for being there.

On arriving at the airport in Spain's capital, we were greeted by officials of the Ministry of External Affairs and a swarm of cameramen, photographers, and journalists—tightly packed into one room—who were eager to ask questions and hear answers.

The External Affairs official who moderated that farce of a press conference allowed just two questions following the reading of a short statement by a colleague whom we had chosen as our spokesman. I should clarify that we were instructed by the External Affairs officials to select a spokesman.

We were driven to a hostel in a Madrid suburb, where, despite being without the comforts of a hotel, we began to get acquainted with the technological advances of modern life, previously unknown to us. Faucets with hot and cold water in the showers and sinks, hallways with lights that turn on as soon as you set foot in them, automatic machines that serve coffee or sodas, mobile phones and the Internet. In short, all that can be achieved when there are no limits on the free initiative of the individual.

After one week at the hostel, where I had my first opportunity to tell the world about the realities of the Cuban prison system, my family and I were relocated to the province of Málaga, a little more than 310 miles (500 kilometers) south of Madrid, to a center for refugees run by the Spanish Commission for Refugee Assistance. We're still living here, alongside refugees from other countries, especially those from the African continent.

Life here hasn't been completely easy; living side by side with other cultures and customs never was. But even when one doesn't have to share a dining room or patio, exile is rarely easy. At the least, you're going to be hindered by the uncertainty and apprehension that go along with being submerged into the depths of the unknown in a land that isn't your own.

Nonetheless, when I look back, I have to thank God that I've ended up where I am, for having facilitated the miracle of my freedom and that of my brothers for the cause, even if we're in a foreign land. I am also grateful for being able to freely express myself without fear of repercussions.

This exile has given me the opportunity to experience in situ, beyond the comforts afforded by modern life in a first-world country, how dynamic a democratic country can be, where opinions don't always travel in the same direction and where the people, through the ballot boxes, have the final word.

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*Omar Ruiz Hernández, a reporter for the Havana-based independent news agency Grupo de Trabajo Decoro in the province of Villa Clara, was arrested during the massive 2003 crackdown on the island's dissidents and independent press. He shared quarters with 11 prisoners in a small barracks until he was freed in July 2010.*

Published May 31, 2011

# I aspire only to rebuild my life while learning to live in freedom and democracy. But to do this, one needs stability and a place to live.

## In exile, unkept promises

By Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez

The clouds of exile are twice as bitter. Being forced from your birthplace and into legal limbo in the land of your grandparents where you're met by complete official abandonment only deepens the wounds. My gloominess has nothing to do with the affection and solidarity shown by the Spanish people, especially the citizens of Madrid. Thanks to many of them my family—my wife and my little 5-year-old Emmanuel—have clothes and shoes. We arrived with nothing. Or worse yet: We arrived loaded down with the heavy baggage of my long imprisonment.

For seven years and four months I lived in a dark cell, measuring just 6 feet by 10 feet (3 meters by 1.8 meters). Of this time, I spent nearly a year in complete darkness with scarcely two liters of water a day, a form of torture meant to soften my physical integrity. All of this for the offense of simply reporting on the terrible situation of the Cuban people under the Castro brothers' tyranny.

From the time we arrived in Madrid, on July 13, 2010, we have been living in the Hostel Welcome, in the Vallecas industrial park, more than 19 miles (30 kilometers) from the center of Madrid, cohabiting with other brothers of the cause, with their families, and with immigrants of other nationalities; and sharing a collective bathroom and facilities, without any semblance of family privacy, despite the assistance and loans promised by officials of

the Spanish Embassy in Havana. Minutes before boarding the flight to Madrid, the officials specified what we would receive on our arrival in Spain to facilitate our insertion into Spanish society.

According to those specifications, our stay at the hostel should have lasted barely a week. Instead, we have, at the time I write this, now been here many weeks, living under difficult conditions since we scarcely have a cent in our pockets to pay for our most immediate needs, not even a piece of candy for our son.

It seems as if the Spanish government is punishing us. Three Cuban prisoners along with their families—all journalists—are in the same situation. All of us decided to stay in Madrid as permitted by the Spanish constitution since the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero is reluctant to grant us political asylum after helping us get out of Cuban prisons and bringing us to Spain.

I'm not asking for anything beyond what we were offered. I aspire only to rebuild my life while learning to live in freedom and democracy, an impossibility for the Cuban people. But to do this, one needs stability and a place to live. We hope to see the promises that were made at the gates to exile soon fulfilled.

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*Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez worked for Cuban government media for 24 years. In March 2003, as he was working as a freelance reporter in Havana, state security agents arrested him as part of the massive crackdown. He was given a 14-year prison sentence.*

Published February 1, 2011

## THE IMPRISONED

*The reporters and editors swept up in the Black Spring crackdown lost large parts of their lives to prison. They are free today after enduring years of inhumane treatment.*

**Pedro Argüelles Morán**, Cooperativa Avileña de Periodistas Independientes  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: March 2011

**Víctor Rolando Arroyo Carmona**, Unión de Periodistas y Escritores de Cuba Independientes  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 26 years  
Released: September 2010

**Mijaíl Bárzaga Lugo**, Agencia Noticiosa Cubana  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 15 years  
Released: July 2010

**Carmelo Díaz Fernández**, Agencia de Prensa Sindical Independiente de Cuba  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 16 years  
Released: June 2004

**Oscar Espinosa Chepe**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: November 2004

**Juan Adolfo Fernández Saínz**, Patria  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 15 years  
Released: August 2010

**Alfredo Felipe Fuentes**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 26 years  
Released: October 2010

**Miguel Galván Gutiérrez**, Havana Press  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 26 years  
Released: September 2010

**Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 14 years  
Released: July 2010

**Edel José García Díaz**, Centro Norte del País  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 15 years  
Released: December 2004

**José Luis García Paneque**, Agencia Libertad  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 24 years  
Released: July 2010

**Ricardo González Alfonso**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: July 2010

**Léster Luis González Pentón**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: July 2010

**Alejandro González Raga**, freelance  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 14 years  
Released: February 2008

**Iván Hernández Carrillo**, Patria  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 25 years  
Released: February 2011

**For Black Spring detainees, freedom has had a high cost.  
Most were forced to leave their homeland for Spain, where  
they face economic and professional challenges.**

**Normando Hernández González,**  
Colegio de Periodistas Independientes  
de Camagüey  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 25 years  
Released: July 2010

**Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta,** Agencia de Prensa  
Libre Oriental  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: August 2010

**José Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernández,** Grupo de  
Trabajo Decoro  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 16 years  
Released: July 2010

**Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez,** Grupo de Trabajo Decoro  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: February 2011

**Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández,** Félix Varela  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: December 2005

**Jorge Olivera Castillo,** Havana Press  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 18 years  
Released: December 2004

**Pablo Pacheco Ávila,** Cooperativa Avileña  
de Periodistas Independientes  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: July 2010

**Fabio Prieto Llorente,** freelance  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: August 2010

**Alfredo Pulido López,** El Mayor  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 14 years  
Released: July 2010

**José Gabriel Ramón Castillo,**  
Instituto Cultura y Democracia Press  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: February 2008

**Raúl Rivero,** Cuba Press  
Imprisoned: March 20, 2003  
Sentence: 20 years  
Released: November 2004

**Omar Rodríguez Saludes,** Nueva Prensa Cubana  
Imprisoned: March 18, 2003  
Sentence: 27 years  
Released: July 2010

**Omar Ruiz Hernández,** Grupo de Trabajo Decoro  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 18 years  
Released: July 2010

**Manuel Vázquez Portal,** Grupo de Trabajo Decoro  
Imprisoned: March 19, 2003  
Sentence: 18 years  
Released: June 2004



# Then

In 2003, Black Spring detainees were scattered in prisons throughout the island, in most cases hundreds of miles from their homes.

# Entonces

En 2003, los detenidos de la Primavera Negra fueron diseminados en prisiones a lo largo y ancho de la isla, en la mayoría de los casos a cientos de millas de sus hogares.





# Today

In 2011, they are spread out in exile, from Spain to the United States, or at home under restrictive parole.

# Hoy

En 2011, ellos están diseminados en el exilio, desde España hasta los Estados Unidos, o en sus hogares bajo un restrictivo régimen de libertad condicional.

