

Country-Specific Questions: Cuba, Prisoners

QUESTION

Why has Canada decided to accept Cuban political prisoners? Wouldn't a real victory mean they could live freely in Cuba?

SUGGESTED REPLY

- Cuba has agreed to release to Canada prisoners of conscience. These are persons who would not otherwise have been released from prison.
- Following the Pope's visit, and in response to a list of political and common prisoners presented by the Vatican, Cuban authorities confirmed that some 300 prisoners would be released.
- On April 6th, twelve of these political prisoners arrived in Canada, some with family members. Two more prisoners and a number of dependents are expected in the coming weeks. Each individual's case has been carefully reviewed under the Immigration Act.
- Of the 19 names on the list presented to us by Cuba, 14 were accepted for admission to Canada and five were refused.
- We are able to take this humanitarian action because of Canada's policy of constructive engagement with Cuba, and the framework for cooperation laid out in the 14 points of the Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration.

Responsive

- Canada's preference would be for all political prisoners released in Cuba to be allowed to remain in that country. However, our position has been that if there were specific cases where Canada could obtain the freedom of individuals by allowing those persons to come to Canada, we would be prepared to look into this possibility.
- Each of the prisoners in question has verified independently his or her desire to leave for Canada.