

## CUBA

ISSUE: The human rights situation in Cuba.

### BACKGROUND:

Since the Revolution, the Cuban government has systematically prevented Cuban citizens from enjoying the political and civil rights that Canadians take for granted. While Eastern European countries are in the process of dismantling barriers to freedom of speech, assembly, migration, religious belief and political choice, Cuba's institutionalized restrictions remain in place. Neighbourhood-level "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution" continue to monitor the lives of all Cuban citizens and their reports partially determine access to better housing, jobs, and education. Due process is lacking, several long-term political prisoners--"plantados"--remain incarcerated, and some dissidents have reportedly been mistreated in jail. In addition, many Cubans who wish to leave their country are prevented from doing so.

From 1986 to 1988, a number of small, independent groups in Cuba were allowed to gather and disseminate information on human rights. In September 1988, however, some members of these groups were prevented from testifying before a visiting delegation from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and several who did testify were subsequently charged with criminal offences. More than twenty members of human rights groups have received jail sentences of up to a year since the UN delegations's visit. Amnesty International believes that those in jail are prisoners of conscience, detained for exercising their rights of freedom of association and expression, and is concerned that the legal procedures followed have fallen short of international standards. In a separate incident during the summer of 1989, three human rights leaders were charged with "spreading falsehoods" and "misleading the international news media" after talking to foreign journalists. All three eventually received jail sentences of up to two years. In November 1989, activists protesting the continued incarceration of long-term political prisoners were attacked and beaten by security personnel.

### Canadian Position

Canada acknowledges the socio-economic gains made in Cuba since the Revolution, but does not subscribe to the notion that individual rights should be subjugated to those of the party or state. Canada is particularly concerned at the refusal of Cuban authorities to allow dependents of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to leave Cuba. In some cases families have been separated for up to nine years, in flagrant violation of international human rights standards. The Canadian government believes that, in such cases, humanitarian values must prevail over political or strategic considerations.

We are concerned at the overall human rights situation in Cuba and deplore the treatment of human rights activists. Canadian representatives will continue to take every opportunity to draw attention to human rights issues, both bilaterally, and in multilateral fora.