



	Cuba
Años	1997-2000



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Fidel Castro's Communist regime continues to clamp down remorsefully on the small, but courageous, number of journalists attempting to report independently on developments on the Caribbean island. These reporters are regularly arrested, jailed, physically attacked or otherwise threatened in raids on their homes. The heads of three independent news agencies - all of which are considered illegal by the authorities - have gone into exile. And although Castro allowed the American cable television network, CNN, to set up a permanent bureau in Havana - the first such permanent US media office on the island since 1969 - visiting foreign correspondents continue to be harassed, threatened or even expelled.

House arrests, raids and the confiscation of documents - and even the most basic of writing instruments - have become almost daily occurrences in Cuba, with the authorities seemingly more determined than ever to silence independent journalism once and for all. More than three dozen journalists were arrested during 1997, and at least nine jailed for varying periods. Three have been deported, following a trend: expulsion is one of the most efficient ways of ridding the island of a dissenting voice.

This year's first clampdown occurred on January 7, when the state security forces detained Rafaela Lasalle, president and founder of the independent news agency, Oriente Press, in Santiago de Cuba. One of the agency's reporters was detained the following day. No reason was given for either arrest, but local journalists suggested that they were part of a wider crackdown on political opponents and independent reporters in the east of the country.

On January 14, Nicholas Rosario Rozabal, chief correspondent of the Independent Press Agency of Cuba (APIC), was beaten up by two men at Santiago de Cuba railway station while waiting for a train to Havana. Nine days later, he was arrested by police having just arrived in Havana by air. He was held incommunicado. The Cuban authorities detained



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three dissidents involved in trying to produce independent economic reports. Marta Beatriz Roque, director of the Association of Independent Economists, and two independent journalists - Tania Quintero and Juan Antonio Sanchez - were held on January 22 near the Czech Embassy in Havana. All three were released the following day. Olance Nogueras Rofes, a journalist with the Bureau of the Independent Press in Cuba (BPIC), was arrested by state security police in a raid on the Havana home of another BPIC journalist, Luis Solar Hernandez, on April 23. The police also confiscated books, videotapes and documents. On June 23, Hector Peraza Linares, a correspondent for another independent news agency, Habana Press, in Pinar del Rio, was arrested by state security and held until September.

In a particularly unpleasant incident, days after searching the apartment of Ana Luisa Baeza, of CubaPress on July 6 and confiscating her typewriter, tape-recorder and books, the authorities threatened her 22-year-old daughter, Luvia, telling her that she would be accused of being a prostitute if her mother did not abandon independent journalism.

Lorenzo Paez Nunez, of BPIC, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for defamation of the National Police on July 12.

On September 4, another Cuban dissident was also jailed for 18 months on a charge of "disrespect for authority." Hector Palacio Ruiz had been arrested in January after giving an interview to Germany's ARD television network in which he strongly criticised Castro's regime, describing the head of state as "crazy" and calling for reforms."

The heads of three independent news agencies - BPIC, Habana Press and Patria - have fled into exile (having been told that they faced imprisonment if they remained). However, Raul Rivero, one of the pioneers of the dissident press in Cuba - together with another, equally persecuted journalist, Nestor Baguer, director of the Apic agency, expressed his determination this year to stay on the island. In spite of constant threats from the state security services, Rivero - who won the Reporters sans



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Frontieres Fondation de France award for 1997 - continues to run the Cuba Press news agency. The risks are quite plain to see. He was arrested on several occasions in the summer of 1997, and held for a total of nearly a month in San Luis, near Pinar del Rio.

In 1991, Raul Rivero - a former Moscow correspondent for the official Cuban news agency, Prensa Latina - broke with the regime by signing a "Letter from Ten Intellectuals" - a petition calling on President Castro to free prisoners of conscience. Of the 10 signatories, Rivero is the only one still living in Cuba. He abandoned official journalism definitively in 1991, condemning it as "fiction about a country that does not exist."

On October 16 this year, Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso - a journalist with another independent news agency, Cuba Press - was arrested at home by two Interior Ministry agents. One of them, apparently called "Aramis," is specifically in charge of harassing Cuba's independent journalists,

Exactly a week later, Jorge Luis Arce Cabrera, a Cienfuegos correspondent for BPIC, was punched, kicked and insulted outside his home by an Interior Ministry agent who went by the name of Adriano. The trial of Bernardo Arevalo Padron - director of the Linear Sur Press news agency in Aguada de Pasajeros, Cienfuegos province - began on October 28. He was charged with writing an article critical of President Castro and could be jailed for six years if found guilty.

On November 21, Oriente Press's Rafaela Lasalle (see above) was assaulted at her home in Santiago de Cuba during a so-called "reprobation meeting" organised by members of the Communist Party and by members of the Vigilance and Protection Group of the Interior Ministry.

Four days later, Odalys Curbelo Sanchez and Juan Antonio Sanchez Rodriguez, of Cuba Press, were taken in for questioning in Pinar del Rio by three state security agents for having taken pictures of posters of the Pope which had been vandalised. During the interrogation, the journalists were threatened with legal action. Curbelo was picked up for questioning once again on December 9 by two counter-espionage agents and two



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state security agents. After presenting him with an official document accusing him of “spreading information to foreign enemy radio stations, of illegally practising his profession and of spying,” the agents threatened him with 10 years in jail. They also declared that they were preparing charges against Curbelo for “enemy propaganda.” The agents claimed that he was spying by photographing prisons in the region, as well as the vandalised posters of the Pope.

In March, CNN became the first American media outlet to broadcast from a permanent bureau in Cuba for 28 years. But just hours after the bureau opened, a senior United States official attacked the Cuban authorities for restricting press freedom.

“There is no press freedom at all,” Jeffrey Davidow, US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, told an international press freedom conference in Panama City on March 18. “The fact that Castro still intends to limit the number of foreign media and prevent international media from distributing information within Cuba itself is a testament to the Cuban government’s fear of a free press.”

The Clinton administration had granted permission to nine other US news organisations to operate in Cuba - the CBS and ABC television networks, Associated Press, three newspapers (the Miami Herald, the Sun-Sentinel of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the Chicago Tribune), the news agency and newspaper group, Dow Jones, and the Spanish-language television network, Univision. However, only CNN has so far been authorised by the Cuban government.

Miami’s Cuban exile community - whose most prominent leader, Jorge Mas Canosa, died this year, an event which was even reported in the Cuban state media - criticised CNN’s debut broadcast from Cuba on March 18. They said it was impossible for CNN to present a balanced view from the island. Miami radio listeners quickly passed judgement, labelling CNN the “Castro News Network.” Cuban-Americans said that CNN might intend to provide balanced coverage of Cuban politics, but



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would inevitably be used by the Castro government to support its agenda.

Ninoska Perez - host of a Spanish-language radio programme and spokeswoman for the staunchly anti-Castro Cuban-American National Foundation - asked why CNN had not put Cuban dissidents on the air during its initial broadcast.

The Cuban authorities this year introduced new regulations for foreign media - including a stipulation that accredited foreign journalists must be “objective” in their reporting. Foreign journalists became aware of the new rules only in June, although the Foreign Minister, Roberto Robaina, had signed the regulations as a Ministerial resolution back in February.

Officials at the International Press Centre (CPI) - the Foreign Ministry body responsible for visiting and resident foreign journalists in Cuba - attempted to minimise the importance of the regulations, saying that they did not represent a change of policy towards the foreign media. However, a group of 30 foreign journalists, met on June 4 to discuss several points - particularly Article 3, which states that an accredited journalist must work “with objectivity, adhering strictly to the facts and in consonance with the professional ethics that govern journalism.” Failure to do so will result in temporary or permanent withdrawal of accreditation or a “call to attention” - a formal reprimand - depending on the circumstances.

The new rules also stipulate that foreign journalists must work only for the news organisations for which they work. Otherwise, they must seek special permission to work for other outlets. PI officials claimed that this was designed to maintain some sort of order in news reporting out of Cuba. Analysts interpreted this as a sign that the Castro government sees itself as the target of a propaganda siege from the US and needs to be able to keep track of news leaving Cuba.

It seems that the Cuban authorities are also preparing to adopt a heavy-handed approach to the foreign media when it comes to covering the visit of Pope John Paul II to the island in January, 1998 - the first papal visit since the 1959 revolution. A number of well-known correspondents have



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already been told that they will not be permitted visas to enter the country - ostensibly because of the way they have covered Cuba in the past.

However, there was one encouraging sign: in December, President Castro not only announced that Christmas celebrations would be permitted in Cuba for the first time since 1969. He also promised that the state-run media would broadcast the Pope's Christmas message. The Vatican is requesting that Cuban Television broadcast four open-air Masses to be conducted by the Pope - and wants editorial control of the transmissions.



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Fidel Castro's Communist regime and its intelligence apparatus, the State Security Agency, continue to clamp down on Cuban journalists attempting to report independently on developments in the country. The authorities routinely harass, threaten, arrest and imprison journalists, often with a goal of "persuading" them into leaving the country. Although two US media organisations - CNN and the Associated Press - are now allowed to operate bureaux in the country, visiting foreign correspondents are also harassed, threatened or even expelled. Many international journalists were denied visas to cover the five-day visit of Pope John Paul II to the island in January, 1998, the first papal visit since the 1959 revolution.

While some 3,000 journalists, roughly half of them from the United States, were accredited to cover Pope John Paul's historic visit to Cuba from January 21 to 25, many international reporters who had written critical stories about Cuba in the past were denied visas. According to CPJ, those denied visas for the papal visit included reporters from the *Miami Herald* and the Miami-based Spanish-language *Telemundo* television network; David Adams of the *St. Petersburg Times*; Rodolfo Pouza and Matilde Sánchez of Argentina's *América TV* and *Clarín* newspaper, respectively; Mario Pérez Colman of Costa Rica's *La Nación*; and former *Newsweek* correspondent Peter Katel. In Miami, where some 800,000 Cuban exiles live, none of the 12 reporters and photographers assigned by the *Miami Herald* to cover the visit received visas.

The landmark visit of the Pope, who made references to human rights abuses throughout his stay, brought a whiff of freedom to the Caribbean island. The Catholic Church was allowed to publicise information regarding the papal visit and had unusual access to the official media, the Pope's Masses were broadcast live - although massive blackouts coinciding with these broadcasts were reported across the island - and for the first time



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since the revolution state television had some harsh words of criticism for Cuba's one-party system, whose shortcomings are usually discussed by Cubans in private.

However, Castro's regime has continued its campaign of persecution against Cuba's 40-odd journalists working outside the state-owned media, who are generally viewed as political dissidents and do not publish or broadcast in Cuba, but mainly send their material to the United States for use in foreign publications and on the Internet. According to IAPA, three journalists - Bernado Arévalo Padrón, Lorenzo Páez Nuñez, and Juan Carlos Recio Martinez - were serving prison terms, while at least two others, Mario Viera and Manuel Antonio Castellanos, accused, respectively, of libelling a senior foreign ministry official and showing contempt for the President, had trials pending.

Bernado Arévalo Padrón, correspondent for the independent news agency, *Línea Sur Press*, began serving a six year prison term in Ariza, Cienfuegos, on June 15, 1998. He was sentenced on October 31, 1997, for showing "lack of respect" for President Castro and a member of the Cuban State Council, Carlos Lage, in a story he had published in which he revealed how a helicopter transported meat from a farm in the town of Aguada de Pasajeros to Havana, while the inhabitants there went hungry. On April 11, Arévalo, who had been suffering from health problems since his confinement to a filthy cell in Ariza prison, was assaulted in the Ariza prison by two State Security agents, suffering numerous injuries to head and body. According to RSF, State Security agents had been threatening Arévalo Padron that he would not leave the Ariza prison alive. In January, the representative of State Security in Ariza Prison had told Arévalo's wife that the only way Arévalo could get out of prison was by arranging for a visa allowing him to leave Cuba. When journalist Jesus Egozcue Castellanos tried to visit Arévalo on March 10, security officials detained him for an hour, searched him, and destroyed letters he was bringing to Arévalo. Egozcue was barred from entering Ariza Prison and warned



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that he would be detained if he returned, CPJ reported.

Lorenzo Páez Nuñez, a journalist with *Buro de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, is serving an 18-month sentence in Cinco y Medio, Pinar del Río. He was convicted of defamation on July 12, 1997, for a story on police misconduct during festivities marking the end of the sugar harvest. His trial lasted only a day and he was denied the right to an attorney.

Juan Carlos Recio Martinez, a reporter with the independent *Cuba Press Agency*, is serving a one year sentence of forced labour at an agricultural co-operative in Villa Clara. He was convicted of participating in “activities against state security” and sentenced on February 13, 1998 after failing to notify the authorities of a written statement he had received in October 1997 from opposition activist Cecilio Monteagudo Sanchez which called on Cubans to abstain from voting in the upcoming elections.

Despite the creation of several independent news agencies since 1995, the authorities have shown no signs of relaxing their stand against the island’s independent journalists. The Communist regime controls all that is published, while access to the Internet is also strictly regulated. Typewriters must be registered; owning a fax machine or photocopier without authorisation is punishable by imprisonment. The Government does not allow criticism of the revolution or its leaders. Laws against anti-government propaganda and insults against officials carry penalties of three months to one year in prison, with sentences of up to three years if President Castro or members of the National Assembly or Council of State are the object of criticism. Charges of disseminating enemy propaganda, which includes expressing opinions at odds with those of the Government, can bring sentences of up to 14 years. In December 1997, the National Assembly of Popular Power approved the Law of National Dignity, which establishes that “The weight of the law will fall on anyone who, in a direct or indirect form, collaborates with the enemy’s media ... with jail sentences of three to ten years” and is aimed directly at the independent agencies who send their material abroad.



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Throughout the year, State Security continued to harass independent journalists (and their relatives), accusing them of operating illegally and confiscating their tape recorders and office equipment, often with a view to goading them into leaving the country. One new way of putting pressure on independent journalists, reported IAPA, was to force landlords not to renew their leases or simply to evict them without any justification.

On January 30, Jorge Luis Arce Cabrera, correspondent for the Cuban Independent Press Bureau, the *Buro de Prensa Independiente de Cuba*, and Jesus Eofcoue Castellanos, a correspondent for *Línea Sur Press*, were threatened with imprisonment by a State Security official at Arce's home in Cienfuegos, CPJ reported. Lieutenant Orebis Montes de Oca reportedly told Arce and Eofcoue that they would be arrested and imprisoned if they wrote stories that "tarnished the image of Cuba." The authorities were upset that Arce had attended the Pope's mass in Havana, as he had been only permitted to travel to Havana in order to arrange for a visa to leave the country. On several occasions since he began working as a journalist in 1994, Arce has been detained or beaten.

On March 12, Rafaela Lasalle, director of the independent news agency, *Oriente Press in Santiago de Cuba*, was summoned to a tribunal on crimes against state security and accused of "enemy propaganda".

On May 17, Ariel Tapia, a journalist with *Cuba Press*, was summoned by the interior ministry's Single System for Vigilance and Protection (SUVP) for an "interview." According to RSF, the head of the SUVP had told a meeting that there was "in the neighbourhood an individual who belongs to the ranks of independent pseudo-journalists financed by imperialism."

On June 17, Cuban authorities refused to grant journalist Raúl Rivero permission to leave Cuba temporarily, IAPA reported. Rivero, who is head of the *Cuba Press Agency* and vice-president of IAPA's Cuba branch, had received an invitation to travel to Spain, but immigration authorities refused to authorise permission for the journalist to go. In the weeks



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following his appointment as regional vice president, the authorities regularly cut off the journalist's telephone service.

Foreign news correspondents were ousted from the Cuban national legislature on July 21, IAPA and *Reuters* reported. President Castro expelled the journalists from the National Assembly after they went there to cover the opening of the new congressional session. "There is a press which shares our noble ideas and another which shares the ideas of imperialism, of capitalism," Castro said, explaining why the foreign correspondents should leave. While foreign media are traditionally allowed only into the opening and closing parts of the National Assembly's sessions, the state-run local media are allowed to stay for the entire session. It was suspected that Castro may have been thinking of a recent US newspaper story, which claimed that he had been treated for hypertensive encephalopathy, an illness which paralyzes brain functions.

On September 5, Héctor Trujillo Pis, a *Cuba Press* correspondent in Caibarién, was summoned by several State Security officials for a "conversation," RSF reported. After five hours, the officers threatened to have him prosecuted for publishing "enemy propaganda and false information."

On September 16, journalist Juan Antonio Sánchez Rodríguez was released after six days in detention. His arrest without charges or explanation followed the government round-up and later release in September of 13 Cuban dissidents - the biggest round-up of dissidents since the papal visit - a move many claimed to be intended as a warning against open acts of defiance. Sánchez Rodríguez also spent ten days in jail from July 28 to August 7, 1997.

On October 1, Manuel Antonio González, a correspondent for *Cuba Press*, was arrested by State Security agents in San Germán, Holguín Province, for having "insulted Fidel Castro," CPJ and RSF reported. González was arrested after he made negative statements about the President to State Security agents who had stopped and questioned him as he was returning from a friend's house and local journalists suspected

that he was deliberately provoked in retaliation for reports filed from Holguín about the activities of political dissidents. Following his arrest, an estimated 2,000 people gathered outside González's home and screamed insults, while State Security agents broke into his home and beat and arrested two of his relatives. According to local sources, many of the protesters were farm workers who were forced to participate in the demonstration. González faced a sentence of between one and three years in jail.

Maria de los Angeles Gonzalez Amaro, who works for *Cuba Press* and is chairperson of the Union of Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers, was summoned to the National Immigration Office on October 2. According to RSF, she was told to leave the country and seek asylum abroad or the interior ministry would take measures against her and her family.

In November, a number of foreign lifestyle magazines, including *Hola* and *Cosmopolitan*, which were sold in Havana through a few state-controlled news-stands, suddenly ceased to be available. Although sold in hard-currency and therefore inaccessible to most Cubans, the glossy publications had a small but enthusiastic readership among Cubans. The authorities explained that only publications "not damaging to our culture and ideology" could be circulated.

On November 27, at the start of the trial of journalist Mario Viera at Havana's Provincial People's Court, opponents and supporters of Castro's government traded blows and insults, *Reuters* reported. The trouble began when sympathisers of the journalist, who was not in custody before the trial, gathered around him outside the court chanting "Mario is telling the truth!" At least three of Viera's supporters were arrested in the scuffle, which lasted for about half an hour and led to the suspension of the trial. A cameraman for *CNN*, Rudy Marshall, who was one of several foreign journalists present, was shoved and punched by a government supporter when he filmed the arrests. Viera's lawyer said he was informed by court officials that the trial had been suspended indefinitely because of the fighting.



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Any hopes that the ninth Ibero-American Summit, held in Havana on November 15 and 16, would bring a whiff of freedom to the Caribbean island – similar to that experienced during and immediately after the landmark visit of Pope John Paul II in January 1998 – were quickly dashed as at least 260 dissidents were temporarily detained in November and December alone and President Fidel Castro’s Communist regime continued its persecution of Cuba’s independent journalists.

Some of the heads of state who attended the Ibero-American Summit, including Spain’s José María Aznar, met with members of the country’s beleaguered independent press, who are viewed as political dissidents and not allowed to publish in Cuba or abroad, in a display of solidarity and support. In a final declaration, the heads of state from Latin America, Spain and Portugal called for the strengthening of fundamental freedoms. “This document contains the foundation on which respect for freedom of expression in Cuba can be built,” said Tony Pederson, president of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA).

Nevertheless, four journalists – Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, Manuel Antonio González Castellanos, Leonardo Varona González, and Jesús Joel Díaz Hernández – are currently serving prison terms in Cuba, while dozens of others were arrested, detained, harassed or threatened throughout the year.

Bernardo Arévalo, founder of the *Línea Sur Press* agency, was sentenced to six years in prison on October 31, 1997, for “insulting” President Castro and Vice-President Carlos Lage. Manuel González, correspondent for the *CubaPress* agency in Holguín, was arrested on October 1, 1998, for “insulting” the head of state and the police in an argument provoked by State Security agents and sentenced on May 6, 1999, to two years and seven months in prison. Leonardo Varona González was also arrested in October 1998 and sentenced in May to sixteen



months in prison for “insulting” the head of state.

Díaz Hernández, executive director of the *Cooperativa Avileña de Periodistas Independientes*, was arrested on January 18, 1999, and sentenced the following day to four years in prison after he was convicted of “dangerousness” under Article 72 of Cuba’s Penal Code, which states: “Any person shall be deemed dangerous if he or she has shown a proclivity to commit crimes demonstrated by conduct that is in manifest contradiction with the norms of socialist morality.” Under the law, any police officer can issue a warning for “dangerousness.” At the discretion of the prosecuting authorities, any person who has received one or more warnings can be convicted of dangerousness and sentenced to a prison term of up to four years. A warning can also be issued for associating with a “dangerous person.”

On February 16, the National Assembly of Peoples’ Power (ANPP) adopted a restrictive new press law, the “Ley de Protección de la Independencia Nacional y la Economía de Cuba” (Law for the Protection of the Cuban National Independence and Economy), which allows for sentences of up to 20 years in prison. The new law, which went into effect on March 15, provides penalties of two to five years in prison and a fine for those who collaborate with the media with the intent to “contribute to or facilitate plans against the Cuban government.” The law prohibits the possession, reproduction and distribution of “subversive” materials and the participation in meetings or demonstrations of a “subversive character.” It also sets penalties of seven to 15 years’ imprisonment for those who provide information, directly or via a third party, to the United States government. This penalty can be raised to eight to 20 years’ imprisonment when the crime is committed with the participation of two or more persons, when it is carried out with the intent to gain financially, or if the guilty party gained access to the information through illicit means.

During 1999, Fidel Castro’s intelligence apparatus, the State Security Agency, arrested, detained or placed under house arrest independent



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journalists attempting to report on trials in progress, anti-government meetings, demonstrations and other developments in their country. The majority were released after short periods of up to several days in prison.

On January 6, State Security agents detained Jorge Olivera, director of *Havana Press*, and *Havana Press* correspondents Jesús Díaz Loyola, Lázaro Rodríguez Torres, and María del Carmen Carro Gómez. The officers raided the Havana home of Estrella García Rodríguez, which serves as the headquarters of *Havana Press*, and arrested the journalists, as well as García and political dissident Javier Troncoso, who were brought to the Second Unit of the Revolutionary National Police (PNR) in central Havana.

According to the journalists, they were detained so that they could not cover the trial of political dissident Lázaro Constantín Durán, who was sentenced to four years in prison in December 1998. Constantín's appeal hearing was set for January 7. After several hours, Olivera and Carro were released, along with García and Troncoso. Loyola and Rodríguez were transferred to the headquarters of the Technical Department of Investigations and held overnight.

On January 13, State Security agents detained *CubaPress* correspondent Odalys Curbelo Sánchez for several hours and warned her not to cover any demonstrations. The same day, State Security agents detained María de los Angeles González Amaro, director of the *Unión de Periodistas y Escritores Cubanos Independientes*, and detained her for two days in order to prevent her from covering a planned march commemorating the birth of Martin Luther King.

Pedro Argüelles Morán, Ciego de Avila correspondent for *CubaPress*, was summoned before the local chief of the Revolutionary National Police (PNR) on January 15. He received a warning for "dangerousness" because he was not working for a state company.

On January 18, Hirán González, *CubaPress* correspondent in the province of Cienfuegos, was summoned to the headquarters of the PNR



in Aguada de Pasajeros, where he was told that he would be put in prison if he kept on passing news to *Radio Martí*, the US government radio station that broadcasts into Cuba from Miami. González was threatened with a trial for “dangerousness.”

Six journalists working for independent news agencies – Jesús Joel Díaz Hernández of the *Cooperativa Avileña de Periodistas Independientes*, Nancy Sotolongo León, a correspondent for the *Unión de Periodistas y Escritores Cubanos Independientes (UPECI)*, Santiago Martínez Trujillo, a photographer for *UPECI*, Angel Pablo Polanco of the *Cooperativa de Periodistas Independientes*, Maria de los Angeles González Amaro, director of *UPECI*, and Pedro Argüelles Morán, a correspondent for *CubaPress* – were arrested in a crack-down between January 18 and 27.

Díaz Hernández was arrested on January 18 and sentenced the next day to four years’ imprisonment for “dangerousness.” Nancy Sotolongo León, Santiago Martínez Trujillo, and Angel Pablo Polanco were detained just prior to a January 25 procession marking the first anniversary of the visit of Pope John Paul II to the island. González Amaro was detained on January 26 after defying a warning by State Security agents not to cover the procession. She was released, along with the other three, on January 29. Argüelles Morán was arrested in Ciego de Avila on January 27 in order to prevent him from covering the celebration of the 146th anniversary of the birth of the Cuban writer, José Martí, on January 28. He was released on January 29.

A Dutch radio journalist, Edwin Kopman, was expelled on January 28 after being accused of giving money to a “counter-revolutionary group.”

On February 24, Jesús Labrador Arias, a correspondent with *CubaPress* in Manzanillo, Granma province, was arrested in his home by State Security agents. The previous day, officers had “advised” the journalist to refrain from covering demonstrations being organised by unauthorised human rights organisations.



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At least 15 journalists were arrested by State Security agents in order to prevent them from reporting on the March 1 trial of four members of the “Internal Dissidents Working Group,” Vladimiro Roca, Marta Beatriz Roque, Félix Bonne, and René Gómez. The “Group of Four,” as they are called, were arrested on July 16, 1997, and charged with “sedition.” At least 11 other journalists were placed under house arrest during the trial. In addition, security forces blocked foreign journalists and diplomats from attending the trial.

Among those arrested were Raúl Rivero, director of *CubaPress* and Cuba’s best-known dissident journalist, Efrén Martínez Pulgarón, Marvin Hernández Monzón, Odalys Curbelo Sánchez, Juan Antonio Sánchez, Orlando Bordón Galvez and Hector González Cruz, Tania Quintero – all of *CubaPress* – Lázaro Rodríguez Torres and Jesús Díaz Loyola of *Havana Press*, Nora Nayo and José Edel García Díaz of *Centro Norte del País*, and Mercedes Moreno, Omar Rodríguez Saludes, and Luis Alberto Lazo of *Agencia Nueva Prensa*.

In March, Raúl Rivero was again detained by the police, who warned him that he could be the first individual punished under the new press law. On April 27, Mario Julio Viera González, director of the *Cuba Verdad* press agency, was visited by a State Security agent, who said Viera could be charged for “insulting” the president in an article he had published on the Internet. He, too, was warned that he could face a heavy prison sentence under the new press law.

Cuban authorities denied Raúl Rivero permission to travel abroad in September to receive a Maria Moors Cabot Prize from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism for his “independent reporting in the face of harassment, arrests, and threats from the government.” Rivero applied for an exit and re-entry permit from the Interior Ministry after he received the invitation from Columbia University in June, but was informed on September 23, the fourth anniversary of the founding of his news agency, *CubaPress*, that his application had been denied. Officials



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have repeatedly told Rivero that he can leave Cuba as long as he does not try to return.

Oswaldo de Céspedes of the *Cooperativa de Periodistas Independientes* was arrested by State Security agents on August 12 as he was about to talk to a US-based radio station. He was released after five hours of questioning and ordered to stop working as a journalist.

In a five-hour television address on November 2, Fidel Castro accused Cuban dissidents of plotting to disrupt the Ibero-American Summit and also acknowledged for the first time the existence of independent journalists in Cuba – by singling out 17 of them by name and calling them “counter-revolutionaries” in the pay of the United States.

Ángel Pablo Polanco of the *Cooperativa de Periodistas Independientes* and Omar Rodríguez Saludes of the *Agencia Nueva Prensa* were arrested in Havana on November 10 while they were preparing to cover a demonstration organised by human rights organisations. At the same time, Aurora García del Busto of the *Cooperativa de Periodistas Independientes*, Ohalis Victores of *Cuba Voz* and José Antonio Fornaris of *Cuba Verdad* were placed under house arrest.

Santiago Santana, director of the press agency, *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental*, in Santiago de Chile, was also detained on November 10, and released two days later. The authorities confiscated his airline ticket to Havana, where the journalist intended to cover the Ibero-American Summit. At least 100 opponents of the regime, including human rights activists and journalists, were detained or placed under house arrest in early November as part of the government’s clampdown on dissidents ahead of the Summit.

In November, the US government boosted the power of *Radio Martí’s* broadcasts to the island from 50,000 watts to 100,000 watts in an effort to overcome Cuba’s jamming of the radio station. The Miami-based *Radio Martí*, intended to broadcast unbiased news to the Cuban people, was estimated to be reaching less than ten percent of Cuba’s 11 million people.

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Like the proverbial Leopard, Cuba is either unwilling or unable to change its spots. The media situation in Cuba is one of the most restrictive in Latin America and hopes that the country would change its harsh attitude to the independent media have been dashed on a number of occasions over recent years. Unlike other countries in the region, Cuba has developed a siege mentality towards the criticism of outside agencies. Indeed, it would appear that the louder the voices of protest the more entrenched the country's authorities have become.

Since 1986, the authorities have re-fused to allow representatives of human rights organisations to travel to the island. This attitude has led to a number of human rights organisations, most notably RSF, sending their brave representatives to the island in an unofficial capacity. The results of such activities has meant that vital information concerning the situation in Cuba has been compiled and provided to the world's media. Unfortunately, these reports have often been achieved at a cost; particularly, in August of this year when journalist Martine Jacot was arrested and interrogated by the police for interviewing members of the independent press.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Cuban media situation is the authorities treatment of the independent media. Under Cuban law, only government approved journalists and media organisations may practice in the profession. As a consequence, a number of journalists who do not wish to come under the control of the government have maintained an independent stance but, due to the laws, are unable to provide news stories to the media inside Cuba. Independent journalists, therefore, ply their trade by providing stories to media organisations outside of the country but receive no government recognition and work under a state of permanent harassment and intimidation.

The Cuban authorities allege that the independent media is made up of



“mercenaries” and “traitors” who seek to earn hard currency by masquerading as journalists. These journalists are frequently victims of accusations; attacks; seizure of equipment; house arrest; pressure on their families, friends or contacts and attempts to discredit them. A repressive law, enacted in February 1999, has also been used to force independent journalists into submission. The law provides for heavy sentences for any person who, “collaborates, by any means whatsoever, with radio or television programmes, magazines or any other foreign media” or “provides information” considered likely to serve US policy.

In a disturbing case that highlighted the absurd lengths that the Cuban authorities will go to harass journalists, a Cuban court in the provinces outside Havana gave a six-month prison sentence on 18 January to dissident journalist Victor Rolando Arroyo. His crime was the bizarre charge of “hoarding” or “monopolising” toys. Arroyo had gone to a toyshop in order to buy toys for underprivileged children in the province of Pinar del Río. Although he was not jailed immediately, Arroyo was given three working days to present an appeal. The appeal by Arroyo subsequently failed and he was forced to serve the six-month sentence. He was released on 19 July.

Another favoured weapon against the independent journalists who exist outside the government authorised media is burglary. On 31 January, the home of journalist Juan González Febles was ransacked by unidentified persons who stole his tape recorder, recordings and several articles.

In addition to invasion of privacy, a number of journalists have been attacked by unidentified assailants. On 17 January, Mary Miranda from the agency Cuba Press was assaulted so violently that she lost consciousness. Another incident occurred on 13 May when Santiago Dubuchet, from the agency Habana Press, was hit on the head in a park in Artemisa. While lying on the floor he was verbally assaulted by a crowd who gathered around him.

On 23 February, Ángel Pablo Polanco, director of the Noticuba news



agency, was arrested by two State Security Department agents. According to information gathered by WAN, the arrest of Polanco would appear to be connected to articles published on judicial proceedings being taken against Oscar Elias Biscet, president of the Lawton Human Rights Foundation. Prior to his arrest, Polanco had been planning to cover the trial, which was scheduled to begin on 25 February. No reason was given for his arrest.

Before the visit of Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, to Cuba for the G-77 summit of developing countries, RSF invited Annan to intervene on behalf of journalists currently jailed on the island. The press freedom organisation also urged Annan to make the Cuban authorities aware that the international community was deeply concerned about the conditions that the prisoners were being held under.

On 15 July, RSF reported that two officers of the Departamento de la Seguridad del Estado (DSE) arrested journalist González Alfonso at his home in Havana. After displaying their arrest warrant, the agents took the journalist to a house on the outskirts of the city, where they tried to convince him to cooperate with the DSE. After six hours of interrogation, the agents returned the journalist to his home.

On 21 July, Luis Alberto Rivera Leyva, director of the Agencia de prensa libre oriental was arrested at his home by security forces. The arrest took place on the same day that two opponents were being tried in Santiago and police only released Leyva from custody after the hearing had been completed. All seats in the court were taken by members of the communist party and police officers in plain clothes. As a consequence, those members of the independent press who, unlike Leyva, had managed to avoid house arrest were unable to enter the court. During early August, the host of Radio Morón, a small station in central Cuba, was dismissed after reading over the air a poem by Raúl Rivero (founder and director of the Cuba Press agency).

An RSF member, journalist Martine Jacot, who was sent by the press

freedom organisation on a mission to Cuba, was arrested and interrogated by police on 17 August. During her ordeal, Jacot had video equipment and several documents confiscated. According to information gathered by RSF, Jacot was arrested by six members of the Cuban security forces as she was waiting to board an airplane to Paris. Jacot had arrived in Cuba one week earlier to interview members of independent press agencies and families of journalists who are currently imprisoned.

Foreign journalists have also been the target of the Cuban authorities. In August, three Swedish journalists, Birger Thureson, from the Nya Dagen daily newspaper, Peter Götell, formally of the Sundsvalls Tidning newspaper and Elena Söderquist, of Arvika Nyheter, were detained.

On 29 August, officials from the Ministry of the Interior arrived at a house in Havana where the journalists were renting bedrooms. Prior to their detention, the three had interviewed several journalists from independent press organisations. The journalists were held by the Cuban authorities for not having visas for journalism. According to a government spokesperson, “it’s an immigration affair. They are being analysed.”

Reacting to the arrest of the three journalists, the CPJ’s communications director said, “the deplorable treatment of these Swedish reporters shows that the Castro government is still terrified of any information it doesn’t control. In Cuba today, anyone can be arrested just for talking to an independent journalist.” The director added, “this case highlights the daily risks that Cuban independent journalists take when they try to cover the news”.

After nearly 40 years of absence, the Chicago Tribune and Dallas Morning News announced that they had been granted permission by the Cuban authorities to open reporting bureaus. According to Reuters, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told executives for the newspapers that approval of the news bureaus was granted in meetings at the Cuban mission to the United Nations in New York, where Cuban President Fidel Castro had been attending the UN Millennium Summit.



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“The Cuba story is one that needs to be told properly”, Chicago Tribune Chairman John Madigan said. “Being there allows you to do that. We have a lot of interest in events in Cuba and this is another way to bring to our readers in-depth coverage of subjects important to them.”

A report released by RSF in September on the press freedom situation in Cuba heavily criticised the authorities. The report highlighted the plight of Cuban journalists, particularly those who are perceived as “dissident” or independent by the authorities. In particular, the report called on the Cuban authorities to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and legalise the independent media organisations. The international press freedom organisation also called on the countries of the European Union and the ACP States to support RSF’s recommendations. Since 1997, five journalists have been sentenced to between six months’ and six years’ imprisonment and over one hundred arrests and cases of questioning have been reported. In this year alone, some 15 journalists have been questioned or placed under house arrest and 19 others have gone into exile.

On 15 September, state security agents detained Jesús and Jadir Hernández Hernández, two brothers who report for the independent news agency Habana Press, in a small town outside Havana. The two journalists had a typewriter, an electronic organizer and a manuscript confiscated. They were accused of smuggling Cuban emigrants to the United States. During intense interrogations over a period of three days, agents threatened to prosecute Jesús and Jadir for “contempt” and “spreading false news” and to bring additional charges under the Law for the Protection of Cuba’s National Independence and Economy.

Towards the end of the year, prominent Cuban journalist, Raúl Rivero stated that the Island’s authorities were refusing his wife permission to leave the country. Raúl Rivero, a former state journalist who is now a critic of President Fidel Castro’s government, told Reuters he believed the refusal to grant his wife, Blanca Reyes, an exit permit was a deliberate move to harass him and his family. “I think it’s to isolate me, to pressure me”, he said. (RSF was a primary source for the above article).