

## Thinking of Cuba on International Human Rights' Day

*Summit, New Jersey. December 10, 2010.* Today marks the anniversary of the United Nations' General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. As the world celebrates the primacy of human rights, Cuba ignores their most basic and universally accepted standards. Among the long list of violations, countless thousands languish in the tropical gulag for "crimes" unique to totalitarian regimes. In Cuba, distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or trying to escape the country are punished with years of prison. Around 5,000 are believed to be in jail for pre-criminal "dangerousness" to the socialist order. Many thousands are held for "crimes" related to economic activities the government does not control --in other words, pretty much everything. Meanwhile, Cuba refuses international accountability or monitoring.

As we celebrate human rights and the holidays, **Harold Alcalá Aramburo**, Age 30, **Yoanny Thomas González**, Age 31, **Ramón Henry Grillo**, Age 36, and **Maikel Delgado Aramburo**, Age 36, are serving the eighth year of their life sentences. Their crime? Hijacking a passenger ferry to try to flee the island-prison; though no one was harmed, to the government this constitutes "very grave acts of terrorism." **Wilmer Ledea Pérez** was only 19 when he participated in the hastily planned escape; he still has 23 years to go of his 30-year punishment.



Three of the asylum-seeking group paid with their lives. On April 11<sup>th</sup> 2003, **Enrique Copello Castillo**, Age 23, **Bárbaro Leodan Sevilla García**, Age 22, and **Jorge Luis Martínez Isaac**, Age 40, were executed by firing squad. We have recently been in touch with one of the mothers. Still devastated by her loss, she decries the international community's failure to hold Cuba

accountable for this injustice and pleads that we remember the five young men wasting away in Cuba's dungeons. She relates how the sentences were delivered a mere five days after their escape attempt was foiled. Two days later, without warning or allowing farewells, they were taken from their cells in the early morning hours and executed. Their families received a 6AM call to go to the cemetery for the funeral. When they arrived, they had already been buried. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights detailed the procedural abuses lacking minimum guarantees of due process and denounced the "arbitrary deprivation of life." Many governments, world leaders, and international organizations strongly condemned this barbarity. Yet, doing business with the dictatorship and engaging its leadership remains the order of the day.

Article 215 of Cuba's Penal Code forbids citizens from leaving without government permission. Even helping those planning to do so calls for years of prison; if property is stolen in the process, this is punishable with death. With no prospects for a decent life in Cuba, many want to leave. Since all property is in state hands, vessels must be taken to escape. Cuba Archive has documented 13 executions and 142 extrajudicial killings for exit attempts; many more are feared. Thousands more have died or disappeared at sea.

The 2003 executions coincided with the Black Spring crackdown. The world distracted with the start of the Iraq war, the Cuban government arrested 75 peaceful dissidents and sentenced them to up to 28 years of prison. Because many of these prisoners of conscience became internationally renowned, they have thankfully been recently released, though exiled. But, the regime's most recent image makeover cannot silence their testimony. Many had already been reporting from prison on the abhorrent conditions, the abuses against prisoners, and the alarming rate of self-mutilation and death among the excessively large and despondent prison population; the majority is very young. See some shocking accounts on the Committee to Protect Journalists' page <http://cpj.org/tags/after-the-black-spring>.

Cuba Archive has documented 1,045 deaths in prison to date. This number includes 138 deaths since 2003 --killings by guards or deaths from medical negligence and suicide- with reports coming from just around 20% of the total number of prisons on the island. Most of the courageous men willing to risk these testimonies from inside the gulag are now in exile. They have given us a small window into this horrendous and dark world. Let us not forget the common humanity of its victims --not today, not any day.

See [www.CubaArchive.org](http://www.CubaArchive.org) for details on Cuba Archive's Truth and Memory Project on deaths and disappearances resulting from the Cuban Revolution. Search the electronic database of cases and please support this work. For additional information, contact (973)701-0520.