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**Contribution of Reporters Without Borders (a non-governmental  
organisation in special consultative status) about press freedom in Cuba**

**Introduction: Overview of press freedom situation**

With a total of 23 journalists detained, Cuba continues to be the world's biggest prison for the media after China. It is the western hemisphere's only country that not does permit any form of media that is not under direct government control. The dialogue begun by the Spanish government undoubtedly contributed to the release in February, just before Raúl Castro took over as Council of State president, of independent journalist Alejandro González Raga and three other detainees from the 2003 « Black Spring ». These four people were forced to flee to Madrid where they live now. However, 19 other journalists arrested during this crackdown and sentenced on absurd charge of being « mercenaries » in the pay of the United States are still serving from 14 to 27-years prison terms. One of them, Ricardo González Alfonso, aged 58, founder of the Manuel Márquez Sterling journalists' association and the independent magazine De Cuba, is also the Reporters Without Borders Cuba correspondent. He was given a 20-year prison sentence in March 2003 and has been held in Havana's Combinado del Este prison since the end of 2004. Since Raúl Castro took over as acting president, in July 2006, three dissident journalists have been sentenced ranging from three to four years in prison for being a "pre-criminal social danger.

Extreme difficulties remain for those not in prison to manage to work as journalists in a country in which the state has a monopoly on news, printing and broadcasting. A new generation born out of an emerging civil society, has taken over websites and the very few underground magazines, people like the blogger Yoani Sánchez. These new networks, made up of young people who have only known the Castroist regime, are trying to use their own resources to develop an alternative press addressed directly to their compatriots within Cuba, the independent media only managing to express itself to the Cuban diaspora.

## **1. Online freedom**

The Internet in Cuba is highly controlled. There is a “national” network which gives users an email address and allows them to send emails abroad but not to surf the net. The “international” network, which costs three times as much, gives access to foreign news websites like the BBC, Le Monde, and Nuevo Herald (Miami-based Spanish-language daily). But if you type in "google.fr", for example, you are redirected to the pages of the official Cuban newspaper Granma or the news agency Prensa Latina. Cuba figures on Reporters Without Borders' list of “Internet Enemies” , which was released on 12 March 2008. The platform ([www.desdecuba.com](http://www.desdecuba.com)) - that hosts, among others, one of the most popular in the country, Generación Y, a blog run by Yoani Sánchez - has been inaccessible from public connection points in cybercafés and hotels at the end of March. The few private connections, used for professional reasons or in secret, take at least 20 minutes to download the home page. Editing and moderating posts has become impossible.

## **2. Government steps to improve the situation**

There have been a few advances in freedom of expression and information since Raúl Castro took over as Council of State president on 24 February, with Cuban being given the right to buy their own computer equipment or enter tourist hotels that have better Internet connections. But nothing more has been done to improve human rights in the country, although three days later after Raúl Castro's investiture, on 27 February, Cuba signed two UN pacts, one on economic, social and cultural rights and the other on civil and political rights. Nothing has been done, either, in return for the European Union's decision on 23 June 2008 to lift the political sanctions it had imposed Cuba after the March 2003 « Black Spring ».

## **3. Working with non-governmental organisations (NGO)**

Impossible, as Cuban government considers any action or statement from outside such as “interference” or “attempt to national sovereignty”.

## **4. Recommendations**

- the quick release of the 23 imprisoned journalists. Reporters Without Borders supports negotiations in pursuit of this which have been opened by the Spanish government,
- an end to discrimination, sanctions and harassment suffered by independent journalists and their families.
- an end to the Cuban government's state monopoly on news, broadcast and printing, lifting of restrictions on individual acquisition of computer equipment and facilitating of Internet access.
- an end to the accreditation system designed to control the activity of foreign journalists working in Cuba, as well as to limiting public access to foreign publications.
- lifting of US government restrictions on telephone and Internet access that obstruct contacts between the island's citizens and their exiled families, as well as those of independent journalists with their foreign-based media,
- foreign embassies and diplomatic representations, in particular EU member countries should open their doors more to independent journalists.

*The data in this report has been gathered and verified by Reporters Without Borders, which has a network of correspondents in 130 countries and partner organisations in a score of countries.*

*In some countries, a journalist can be imprisoned for several years just for a word or a photo someone does not like. Reporters Without Borders, founded in 1985, works daily to support press freedom because imprisoning or killing a journalist removes a key witness and threatens the right of all of us to be kept informed of the news.*

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