

## **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPE-CUBA NGO NETWORK ON THE DECISION OF THE EU TO DELAY ITS REVIEW OF THE COMMON POSITION**

*23 JUNE 2010*

On 14 June 2010 the European Union announced the postponement of its evaluation of the EU Common Position on Cuba until September, apparently in reaction to recent development in the area of human rights in Cuba. The Europe-Cuba NGO network reiterates its call to the EU to set clear and transparent criteria for any change to the Common Position.

The Europe-Cuba NGO Network welcomes the recent steps taken by the Cuban government resulting in a transfer of twelve political prisoners closer to their families and conditional release of critically ill Ariel Siegler Amaya. It is important, however, to place these steps in the broader context of the state of human rights in Cuba, including for example, the continued harassment and detentions and imprisonment of members of the opposition and civil society.<sup>i</sup> It is also important to recall that Cuba has not yet ratified the UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICCPR and ICESCR) signed by the government in 2008, a step heralded by many at the time as a promise of change.

It is essential that any future decisions by the EU regarding its policy towards Cuba be based on independent baseline criteria which will clearly define what can be considered to be improvement in the human rights situation. This will not only aid EU member states in assessing the Cuban government's commitment to reform but will also provide the Cuban government with a clear understanding of the EU's expectations.

When setting criteria for what it considers to be "significant improvement" in the area of human rights, the EU must maintain its role as a defender of human rights and democracy and refer to its own conclusions stated in previous policy documents on Cuba. This includes the Council Conclusions on the evaluation of the EU Common Position on Cuba which were adopted in June 2009 as well as the European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2010 on prisoners of conscience in Cuba.

The Europe Cuba NGO Network, recalling its previous statements, repeats its call to the EU to state its baseline criteria of what "significant improvement" means in the following areas:

1. Number of political prisoners released as well as the total number of political prisoners still in jail;
2. Treatment and conditions of critically ill prisoners;
3. Access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to Cuban prisons;
4. Ratification and implementation of the ICCPR and ICESCR;
5. Patterns of documented harassment and acts of repression against political prisoners, political dissidents and independent civil society in general;
6. Visits by UN Special Thematic Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak,<sup>ii</sup> to allow the island to carry out an independent assessment.
7. A consistent, transparent and constructive Cuba–EU human rights dialogue

The EU policy on human rights and democracy policy in Cuba should not be lead by single, well-timed, symbolic actions of Cuban government. In this regard, the postponement of the decision to September makes little sense. Leaving the decision until December, at the regular semi-annual review of the Common Position, would have given the Cuban government a real opportunity to show consistent and sustained commitment to improving the human rights situation in the country. It now falls to the EU to make it clear what expectations must meet if there is to be any change to the EU-Cuba relationship.

**Signed by:**

**Asociación de Iberoamericanos por la Libertad**, Spain

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide**, United Kingdom and Belgium

**Cuba Futuro**, Netherlands

**Freedom House Europe**, Hungary

**Fundacion Hispano Cubana**, Spain

**IKV Pax Christi**, Netherlands

**Institut Pontes**, Czech Republic

**International Society for Human Rights**, Germany

**KIC (Christian Democratic International Center)**, Sweden

**Lech Walesa Institute**, Poland

**People in Need**, Czech Republic

**People in Peril Association**, Slovakia

**Swedish International Liberal Centre**, Sweden

**Unitas Foundation**, Estonia





UNITAS  
Foundation



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<sup>i</sup> Despite Cuban government promises to transfer political prisoners in critical health to hospitals, to transfer some of the prisoners closer to their families, and to release some of the political prisoners, the overall situation for political prisoners in Cuba remains the same. There are still more than 200 political prisoners in Cuban jails. Out of the 75 imprisoned during the Black Spring in 2003, 51 have not yet been released and one, Orlando Zapata, died earlier this year in prison. In the meantime other members of the opposition and civil society continue to be persecuted, detained and imprisoned.

One of the most striking examples is the case of Dr. Darsí Ferrer, who was arrested in July 2009 and held in prison for almost a year without a trial. On 22 June 2010, he was finally put before court and sentenced to 15 months, but allowed to serve the remaining four months of his sentence under house arrest. Dr. Ferrer's case has received the attention of Amnesty International which has recognized him as a prisoner of conscience, and also of European diplomats from Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary and Poland, who have visited his family, to demonstrate their support and concern.

<sup>ii</sup> Nowak recently complained that despite an initial invitation by the government to visit the island, the Cuban authorities have, since 2005, subsequently blocked his attempts to accept that invitation. In response, the Cuban Mission to the UN in Geneva said, "Cuba does not need an objective assessment 'of the situation in the country'."