

Committee for

FREE TRADE UNIONISM

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Intimidation, Harassment and Arrests of Independent Unionists Continues in Cuba

WASHINGTON – In a new wave of harassment and intimidation of free trade union leaders in Cuba, the government of President Raul Castro has arrested 14 activists at their homes for trade union involvement. Among those harassed was Carmelo Diaz Fernandez, President of the Confederation of Independent Workers of Cuba (CTIC), who was threatened at his home Monday, March 2, by agents of state security.

Diaz, who spent four years in jail before being released in 2007 for health reasons, was told by the Cuban security agents that he would be sent back to jail if he did not relinquish his role as CTIC president and the campaign for freedom of association by trade unionists in Cuba.

According to a report issued by the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions, CONIC there were several arrests and intimidations of independent trade unionists throughout the island. Intimidation of CONIC and the Union of Workers of Light Industry (SITIL) occurred in Nueva Gerona, Isla de la Juventud, Santiago de Cuba, Perico, Matanzas, and Havana by offices of the Department of State Security (DSE).

The Cuban government insists that it follows International Labor Organization Conventions it has ratified, Conventions No. 87 and 98, which guarantee the right of workers to form organizations of their own choosing and to bargain collectively. However, the actions by state security and the police demonstrate that union leaders remain under grave threat, treated as criminals if they try belong to or form independent unions.

“These are brave men whose only ‘crime’ was talking with other workers about organizing to bargain with their employers,” said Thomas R. Donahue, the former president of the AFL-CIO who is spearheading an international appeal campaign for the release of political and trade union prisoners. “We have long been impressed by Carmelo Diaz Fernandez and his colleagues and by their determination to continue the struggle to assist workers in Cuba in the face of continued harassment by the Cuban government.”

(More)

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Current independent trade union leaders who languish in jail after the 2003 crackdown include, Alfredo Felipe Fuentes, Miguel Galvan Gutierrez, Ivan Hernandez Carrillo, Nelson Moline Espinoza and Hector Raul Valle Fernandez.

“The continuing imprisonment of these men is not only inhumane, but it is an egregious violation of international law and of Cuba’s commitments as a signatory of the ILO Conventions,” Donahue said.

The Committee for Free Trade Unionism has called for the Cuban government to cease its crackdown on labor leaders and negotiate and allow the formation of independent trade unions in accordance with international labor standards and norms.

The ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association has issued reports in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 finding that Cuba was and remains in violation for imposing a trade union monopoly controlled by the state, and urged immediate reforms and the release of all trade union and political prisoners in Cuba.

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