

## **Cuban government fights with black market**

After the initial promises it seems that Raul Castro stopped all reforms which were aiming at improving Cuban economy. Instead of that he decided to prosecute all the people who make their living out of black market and cut down any initiatives related to home production which is illegal in Cuba.

The offensive of the regime against black market came after the summer hurricanes which destroyed the Island. The damages caused shortage of everything. Cubans who in majority were not receiving any support from government decided to take initiative and take care for the things which government was not able to provide. It led to development of illegal home productions of basic goods which were not available through official shops and expansion of black market.

There were reports of robbery of the shops and storages to sell goods later on black market. In Havana the police found out and closed down more than 160 illegal home production entities, 200 illegal storages full of products which Cuba is short of. Majority of people was charged for keeping for profit purposes goods needed in the island like toothpaste, food, petrol, materials needed for rebuilding the houses.

One Cuban was arrested for having 320 toothpastes another for 15kg of cheese or 73 packages of coffee.

The officials didn't reveal the number of people arrested. They only announced that 35% of arrested people went to prison, 16% had to pay various fine.

Sources: Gazeta Wyborcza, Dec 5, 2008

## **Jailed Cuban journalist wins prize**

A Cuban journalist who has been behind bars for five years and has another 15 years left on his sentence was awarded Reporters Without Borders' Journalist of the Year award.

Ricardo González Alfonso, 58, was arrested in 2003 when the Cuban government conducted a nationwide sweep against dissent. He was one of 26 reporters imprisoned.

A former correspondent for the Paris-based press advocacy group Reporters Without Borders, he was accused of being in the pay of the United States and "undermining Cuba's independence and territorial integrity".

González is a former employee of the state television agency who was in charge of children's broadcasting. He started working for the opposition Cuba Press in 1995, and became a correspondent for Reporters Without Borders in 1998. He tried to train independent journalists, who often lack basic reporting skills.

"We chose Ricardo because he really tried to improve independent journalism on the island with the creation in 2001 of the Manuel Márquez Sterling association, a kind of journalism school he created," said Reporters Without Borders' Americas desk director Benoit Hervieu. "After that, he published a review called De Cuba, but unfortunately there were only three editions of the review." It was shut down by the government.

González is currently at the Combinado del Este prison in Havana, where he is reported to be in poor health. "He remains a symbol of the triumph of the independent journalist on the island," Hervieu said.

González's prize, awarded Thursday in Paris, was picked up by Alejandro González Raga, a Cuban journalist who was released from prison in February and exiled to Spain.

With 23 journalists in prison, Cuba is second only to China in the number of jailed members of the press. China has locked up 28.

Source: Miami Herald

### **Cuban police are detaining activists prior to Human Rights Day**

According to exile groups in Miami up to a dozen human rights activists have been detained in Cuba in police operations apparently intended to keep them from attending Human Rights Day events in Havana on Wednesday December, 10.

Protests were planned by various Cuban dissident groups, including the Ladies in White organization formed by wives and female relatives of 75 dissidents and independent journalists who were rounded up during a 2003 crackdown on political dissent.

The Federation of Latin American Women (FLAMUR), a group that lobbies for an end to Cuba's dual currency, said Cuban State Security agents beat their members and broke one woman's hand.

"They did not even ask for identification," FLAMUR President Belinda Salas said in a statement. "My husband Lazaro got such a beating that he was bleeding profusely through his mouth and head. . . . They ripped my blouse, leaving me naked, and the beating left me with a fractured hand."

The Democratic Directorate, a Miami exile group that works with dissidents in Cuba, said they knew of about a dozen people in cities across Cuba that had been arrested since Monday December, 8.

Last year, the Cuban government launched a massive operation at bus stations, train stations and highways where dissidents were trying to catch rides to Havana Human Rights Day events. The operation illustrated how well Cuban State Security monitors opposition activities -- and how quickly they were able to snatch people up.

Last week Cuban bloggers reported being taken to police headquarters, where they received warnings against attending a scheduled Internet bloggers conference.

"Amazing: They are violating human rights so people can't celebrate human rights," said U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutiérrez, who headed a Bush administration effort to prepare for Cuba's transition to democracy.

"I was reading about the crackdown on the bloggers, and I suppose that's all related. It reminded me of something like rounding people up because they are suspected of witchcraft," he said. "It sounds so crazy and so out of touch with reality and so old-fashioned ... old-fashioned like centuries ago."

Source: Miami Herald