



## **AMERICA/CUBA - Catholic Church announces release of other prisoners**

Havana (Agenzia Fides) – The Catholic Church announced yesterday evening, 4 March, the release of eight prisoners at the conclusion of its dialogue with the Government of President Raul Castro. Among the released detainees is Pedro Argüelles, a member of the group of 75 dissidents arrested in March 2003 during the so-called “Primavera Negra”. Argüelles, considered a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, was director of the dissident cooperative of independent journalists and may remain in Cuba after his release from prison. He was serving a prison sentence of 20 years. After his release, only four detainees in the “Group of 75” will remain in custody, too reluctant to go into exile once released from prison.

The spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Havana, Orlando Marquez, also announced the release and transfer to Spain of seven other detainees, who are not members of the opposition movement: Ricardo Lázaro Chacón, Luis Caro, Antonio Rodríguez, Agustín Cervantes, Ricardo Galván, Luis Mariano Delis and Yoel Rodríguez. These prisoners were convicted for crimes of “piracy”, “insults”, “threats” and “illegal attempt to leave the country,” among others. Five of them appear on the list of political prisoners prepared by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, an illegal but tolerated body.

According to Orlando Marquez, from the beginning of July until now “85 prisoners have accepted the proposal to leave prison and move to Spain.” When the release process began, there were 52 prisoners in the “Primavera Negra” group: 40 went to Spain with their families, while the rest refused exile. In January, the Church gave its support to economic reforms by President Raul Castro, and announced the release of other political prisoners in 2011, thus reaffirming the importance of her role after decades of tensions with the Government of Cuba. (CE) (Agenzia Fides, 05/03/2011)