

PRISONERS OF COLOR

**ISLAS WILL DEDICATE A PAGE IN EACH ISSUE TO THE AFRO-CUBANS SERVING TIME
IN CUBA'S PENAL SYSTEM**

In many countries people are detained for trying to exercise their rights of freedom of expression, association, assembly, or movement. Some are imprisoned because they or their families are involved in political or religious activities. Some are arrested because of their connection with political parties or national movements that oppose government policies. Trade union activity or participation in strikes or demonstrations are common causes for imprisonment. Often, people are imprisoned because they questioned their government or tried to publicize human rights violations in their own countries. Some are jailed on the pretext that they committed a crime, but it is in fact because they criticized the government. People who are imprisoned, detained or otherwise physically restricted because of their political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, color, or language and who have not used or advocated violence are considered to be prisoners of conscience.

Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez

Juan del Pilar Goberna
Activist and defender of Human Rights
Havana, Cuba

Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, a young graduate and independent journalist, was born on September 19, 1978, in the hilly neighborhood of Cinco Palmas, Media Luna, in Granma Province. There he completed his primary schooling, and then spent the rest of his childhood and adolescence in the provinces of Camagüey and Sancti Spiritus. He the grandson of Eutimio Guerra, who in 1957, was summarily executed in the Sierra Maestra, by Ernesto Che Guevara.

Guerra Pérez lived a sort of nomad's life with his five siblings in an extremely poor rural family. Their mother was their only provider. In 1996, he moved to Havana Province seeking a better standard of living. He found residence in Aguacate and

employment in Cattle Firm Valle de Picadura, where he worked tenaciously hard for six years, until he was promoted to manage three ranches. Yet, he ended up leaving due to personal dissatisfaction and low wages. Then, he worked as a custodian in Varadero tourist areas, and was even self-employed.

Given his experience with the poverty, privations and ambiguities generated by the totalitarian regime, Guerra Pérez began to take notice of the nation's socio-political and economic reality, and joined an opposition movement. Around 2003, he joined the Martí Current, led by Professor Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez. His good work would lead him to become its delegate for South Havana.



Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez

By the end of 2004, he began to work as an independent journalist for the Marti Current's Information Center, and to collaborate with *Radio Martí*. Husband and wife José Ávalos and Marta Martínez decided to take

him into their home in Havana, but Guerra Pérez had to leave the city because of police threats and pressure. This resulted in a group of people, including him, going to the Plaza of the Revolution on July 13, 2005, and declaring themselves on a hunger strike to protest being denied permission to live in Havana. These citizens' claims were met with brutal repression at the hands of State forces and police-directed hordes on the street. Guerra Pérez was sentenced to a year and ten months of prison for Public Disorderliness.

Guerra Pérez not only had to endure incarceration at the Technical Investigation Department (DTI), but also in two other prisons—Valle Grande (Havana) and Nieves Morejón (Sancti Spíritus), in which he suffered privations, and physical and psychological abuses. The lack of medical attention or medication, bad food, and deplorable hygienic conditions destroyed his health. Yet, he did not stop criticizing and denouncing the abuses and violations.

He was freed on May 8, 2007, and continues with civic firmness his opposition, and has been detained for short periods at least 111 times. This young, black Cuban, oppositionist is a blogger, and has worked with the *Hablemos Press* Information Center since February 2, 2009, providing information about reality in Cuba, particularly regarding the totalitarian regime's excesses.