

# 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.

## Pedro Argüelles Morán

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The long fight for democracy of the well-known, peaceful dissident and independent journalist Pedro Argüelles Morán was disrupted by the repressive wave of 2003. Born on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1948, in Ciego de Ávila, he completed his primary and secondary school education at the Hermanos Martistas' school. Later on, he specialized in Geodesics and Mapmaking in Havana.

In 1992, he joined the Cuban Committee for Human Rights; the following year he began working as an independent journalist, publishing denunciations and information about local and national realities under the pseudonym Pedro del Sol.

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1995, he participated in the Camagüey-Ciego de Ávila United Front, an umbrella grouping of eleven dissident organizations that designated him their spokesperson. That same year he promoted the creation of an agency titled *Patria*, the first independent news agency in the Cuban interior.

He also busied himself as a correspondent for the Cuban Press Agency, in Ciego de Ávila, and joined the Ávila Cooperative of Independent Journalists (CAPI), which partners with the Nueva Prensa Cubana [New Cuban Press] project. He has headed CAPI since 1999, when he took the place of Joel Díaz Hernández, who was incarcerated.



Argüelles Morán suffered constant harassment from the police authorities because of his tireless work for democracy and freedom of information. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) warned him about the “dangerous” nature of his behavior, because he was not employed by any state entity. Arrested on the 27<sup>th</sup>, he was held for 48 hours, to keep him from covering a commemorative act marking José Martí’s birth. Then he got the “sweet treatment.” Two police officials began to visit him regularly, to “chat with him about the situation” in Ciego de Ávila. Argüelles Morán was the ninth signatory of the 11,000 people who signed their names on the Varela Project petition, which was presented at the National Assembly and called for a referendum on the subject of basic rights in Cuba.

He was detained on the first day of what came to be known as Black Spring (March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003), after which he was unjustly sentenced to twenty years of prison, which he began to serve at the

Nieves Morejón Prison (in Sancti Spiritus). Afterwards, he was transferred to the Canaleta Penitentiary in Ciego de Ávila.

While in prison, Argüelles Morán has been the victim of numerous beatings and reprisals at the hands of the authorities. He has even been denied the medication he very much needs and his family brings him. It is no wonder he has often gone on hunger strikes, to protest the violation of his rights.

Argüelles Morán suffers from an ischemic heart condition, hardening of the arteries, general arthrosis, pulmonary emphysema, prostate adenoma, gastritis, and chronic synovitis. His vision is severely impaired and he was recently diagnosed with diabetes mellitus. Yet, none of this keeps him from continuing to write; his articles are published on numerous foreign web sites. Despite the fact his rights are violated and he suffers injustice, Pedro Argüelles Morán’s firmness has not been shaken. He has held steadfastly faithful to his values and convictions—which he has defended for over fifteen years—under the worst of circumstances.