

Due to their historical and current importance, the present issue of ISLAS is publishing six documents that are part of an international campaign against racism in Cuba that began as a reaction on the part of intellectuals and opinion leaders to the arbitrary arrest and incarceration of Dr. Darsi Ferrer Ramírez. The following documents reflect the conflicting or coincident opinions of the letter writers themselves.

Open letter from Abdias Nascimento

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF CUBA

HIS EXCELLENCY GENERAL RAÚL
CASTRO RUZ

Government House (Palacio de la Revolución)
Havana, Cuba

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL

HIS EXCELLENCY LUIZ INÁCIO LULA
DA SILVA

Government House (Palacio do Planalto)
Brasília, Brazil

TO DR. DARSI FERRER RAMÍREZ

ACTIVIST of the BLACK MOVEMENT of
CUBA

Valle Grande Prison
Havana, Cuba

In response to requests from intellectuals, social activists, and personalities from several parts of the world, in particular those of the Black Movement of Brazil, I wish to address your Excellencies, the Presidents of Brazil and of Cuba, to express my deep concern over the current situation of Cuban physician and civil and human rights activist Dr. Darsi Ferrer.

On July 21, 2009, when he was participating in the organization of a peaceful demonstration in defense of those rights, Dr. Ferrer was imprisoned under criminal charges that

are not in keeping with the character, life history, and moral values of this renowned activist of the Cuban Black Movement. Since then, he has been held prisoner under conditions that characterize an abuse of his rights.

The facts as I have come to know them indicate that we are facing a clear case of political intimidation against those, in Cuba, who raise their voices in protest against racism, discriminatory practices, and all kinds of intimidations meted out to citizens who dare call for the establishment, in their country, of a State that is respectful of civil rights, of the right of citizens to freely congregate and form organizations, and to freely demonstrate their opposition to discriminatory practices of which they feel they are a target for one reason or another.

We all know that Dr. Darsi Ferrer is not a criminal. The facts indicate that because of his long history of consistent struggle on behalf of the rights of those who are the most marginalized in Cuba —whom we know to be unequivocally those of African descent—the Cuban authorities are trying to silence a voice that makes them uneasy. The fact that the Cuban authorities treat him as a criminal, and have gone to the point of imprisoning him in a detention camp reserved for common criminals, is a clear statement of those authorities' disdain for internationally recognized norms of conduct.

For this reason, in protest against the violation of his civil rights, Dr. Darsi Ferrer has gone on a hunger strike. We fear for his precious life, especially at a time when the Cuban nation so needs, for its own democratic revival, citizens who are fully committed to upholding the moral and ethical values that guide life in a democratic society. Dr. Ferrer is one such citizen.

Convinced of the injustice that is being meted out against Dr. Ferrer and, through him, against the Black Movement of Cuba and the Cuban population as a whole, as well as civil, human and democratic rights the world over, I appeal to the government of the Republic of Cuba and to His Excellency Raúl Castro Ruz, to cease all and any acts of intimidation against Cuba's antiracist activists and to free Dr. Ferrer or else try him as a political prisoner, with the right to legal defense with representation of his choice; I appeal to the Federal Government of Brazil and to His Excellency Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to intervene urgently with the Government of the Republic of Cuba, on behalf of respect for the democratic rights of Dr. Darsi Ferrer, I beseech Dr. Darsi Ferrer to cease his hunger strike immediately, and to stop putting his life at risk, for we must not be deprived of his pre-

cious civic contribution, at a time when Cuba and the world require people with the intelligence, integrity, and justice that he has consistently displayed.

I join my voice with those who day by day, more and more insistently, are calling for Dr. Darsi Ferrer's release from prison, while inviting all those who cherish democratic freedom, who struggle against racism, and who have always upheld the Cuban people's right to exercise full sovereignty, to intercede with the authorities of Cuba for the immediate termination of its onslaught against the civil rights militants of that country.

Rio de Janeiro, 30 October 2009

ABDIAS NASCIMENTO

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