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May 2, 2020

To: President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez

President of the Republic of Cuba
Office of the President
Hidalgo Esq. 6
Plaza de La Revolución, CP 10400

Sent via email: despacho@presidencia.gob.cu

Dear President Díaz-Canel,

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Amnesty International, and Article 19 Mexico and Central America Office are writing to call for the immediate release of jailed journalist Roberto de Jesús Quiñones Haces amid the sweeping COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists' most recent [annual survey](#) conducted on December 1, 2019, there were at least 250 journalists behind bars around the world, including in Honduras, Venezuela, and Cuba. On March 30, CPJ published an [open letter to world leaders](#) urging the release of all journalists imprisoned for their work. The situation of Cuban journalist Roberto Quiñones appears particularly dire, so we are reiterating that call to you on his behalf at this time of grave public health concern.

Roberto Quiñones, a lawyer and contributor to the news website *CubaNet*, has been [imprisoned](#) in the Guantánamo Provincial Prison since September 11, 2019, where he is serving a year-long correctional labor sentence. A Guantánamo court sentenced Quiñones in August 2019 after he refused to pay a fine for charges of “resistance” and “disobedience” stemming from his April 22, 2019, arrest while reporting on a trial.

In September 2019, Amnesty International [named Quiñones a prisoner of conscience](#), imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his freedom of expression, and called for his immediate and unconditional release. In November 2019, representatives of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression from the UN and IACHR, [informed your government](#) that the Working Group was investigating Quiñones' case as a potential case of arbitrary detention and violation of due process.



Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights guarantee the right to “seek, receive and impart information” freely, and include specific protections for journalists. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Cuba signed in 2008, provides for the right to hold opinions “without interference” and the right to freely “seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds,” including on issues of public interest. We remind you that Cuba must guarantee these rights, which are particularly relevant to the current global context.

Cuba also has a duty to [protect its population](#) amid the COVID-19 pandemic without discrimination, including those deprived of their liberty. According to the [World Health Organization](#), “People deprived of their liberty, and those living or working in enclosed environments in their close proximity, are likely to be more vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease than the general population.”

Imprisoned journalists have no control over their surroundings, cannot choose to isolate, and are often denied necessary medical care. In addition, some individuals appear to be at particular risk of severe illness or death linked to COVID-19, including older individuals and people with pre-existing medical conditions, according to the WHO.

Roberto Quiñones is no exception. In letters published by *CubaNet* on [October 1](#) and [March 5](#), Quiñones has described his conditions at the Guantánamo Provincial Prison, which include overcrowding, poor food and water quality, and lack of adequate medical attention. Quiñones was reportedly subject to retaliation for publishing this information in the form of “disciplinary measures,” including denying access to phone calls and barring him from outdoor spaces in the prison.

Quiñones has served more than half of his year-long sentence, during which time he has suffered from escalating health problems, including psoriasis that, according to [CubaNet](#), has worsened in detention, and significant weight loss due to gastrointestinal complications, according to his wife. With detainees at increased risk from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cuban government must release Roberto Quiñones.

Mr. President, no journalist should have to choose between silence or prison. On this World Press Freedom Day, we urge you to release Roberto Quiñones, protect the free flow of information, and guarantee that all journalists in Cuba are able to perform their fundamental role in society, free of any reprisals.

Sincerely,

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Amnesty International
ARTICLE 19 Mexico & Central America Office