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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND
OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 26 February 1988 from the Permanent Representative of
the United States of America to the United Nations Office at Geneva
addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights

On behalf of my Government, I have the honour to request that you circulate the enclosed letter as a document of the Commission on Human Rights under agenda item 12.

(Signed) Joseph Carlton PETROfiE
Ambassador

Annex

Prison of Habana del Este
Ciudad de Habana
Cuba

February, 1988

Sr. Armando Valladares Perez
Ambassador, U.S. Delegation,
44th UN Human Rights Conference
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. Ambassador:

We are a group of political prisoners, the "plantados", who are very concerned about a series of events that began on the 15th of September, 1987, with the surprise visit to our cell block of a Portuguese journalist, Eugenio Alves, accompanied by counter-intelligence operatives and prison officials. We feel it is our duty to alert you of the machinations and maneuvers that have taken place since that date.

We wish to make known to you all that follows:

- 1) As you already know, we (the plantados) have been lodged in the north wing of the 4th cell block of building I, in the Habana del Este prison (Combinado del Este); the site has been prepared especially for a "theatrical show" put on by the highest levels of the Ministry of Interior for the benefit of foreign visitors they planned to invite before, and perhaps during the 44th UN conference on human rights. Their objective is to project an image, totally false, of what have been, are, and will continue to be our conditions behind bars.
- 2) For the first time in the almost 30 years of the existence of the political prisons which you know so well, the regime has allowed foreign delegations to visit us, with the perverse goal of demonstrating our living conditions - as if these have always been so - so that those delegations might broadcast to the world their false impressions.
- 3) The regime has not allowed other interested international delegations to visit us, such as the Argentine Commission on Human Rights, International Red Cross, Amnesty International, etc.
- 4) We have been very disturbed by the marked interest of the majority of the visiting delegates to know only about our living conditions at this time, and not those suffered until a few months ago, or that are suffered in this same prison and in others by political prisoners. It took great effort to get them to listen to our testimony regarding violations of human rights that occurred before we were moved to this show area mounted by the regime. (It is our duty, and in this case our

pleasure, to highlight the warm and receptive attitude of the visiting U.S. team headed by Democratic Congressman Bruce Morrison, all of whose members listened to our denunciations with utmost interest and thus came to know the reality of our existence in prison.)

5) We have been disturbed to no less great extent by the emphasis that the visitors placed on taking films and photographs of us and of this stage. Had we permitted this, we would have provided credibility to this farce. As examples, we wish to highlight the attitudes of the following:

A) Sylvia Stevens, English, who said she was a member of the "staff" of Channel 3 of London Television when she introduced herself to us during her visit last November 17. Miss Stevens declared that the goal of her visit was to depict our real situation, and to refute an article that appeared in the Miami Herald in this respect. To fulfill this goal she required graphic testimony. When we refused to cooperate, she became offended and more offended still when we suggested that she film the reality of the prisons where we have spent our long confinement. Miss Stevens returned several hours later accompanied by a "cameraman." Her anger reached its peak when we renewed our refusal to cooperate in her films or photos.

B) Amanda Costello, Brazilian, co-chairman of the International Organization against torture, with headquarters in Milan, Italy. Miss Costello recorded our testimony during a visit on September 18, 1987. On her second visit on January 27, 1988, she admitted that she still had not published our testimony, insisting, as she had in the first visit, that without photographs our commentary was worthless. On both occasions, we were disconcerted by her emphasis on our physical appearance not on our state of health. As she left, she declared, "I will return only if you permit me to take photographs."

C) The last delegation to visit us was comprised of Irish citizens Mary Benotti, member of the European Parliament, and Evelyn Geldoff, correspondent in Cuba for various European journals: The Guardian, London; O Expresso, Lisbon; Irish Times, Ireland. This delegation was interested in speaking to various political prisoners, among them Juan A. Berto Valdis Teran 71 years old. After staying with us for a short time, asking questions and recording our testimony, they left our area at the insistence of Ministry officials and moved to another building (in the direction of Pinal) in order to conduct their interview with Valdis Teran in the protocol room.

They were isolated from all of us, and under technical surveillance by sound and video devices of State Security. At the end of the interview, given its amiable nature and the agreeable manner of the visitors, Valdes Teran did not wish to go against them, and so he agreed to interpret two of his songs and permit the women to take photographs.

D) We are absolutely certain that the high command of the Ministry of Interior, following even higher orders, has outlined a consistent strategy to arrange the greatest possible quantity of opportunities for films and photographs to be taken of us in this staged setting, or outside of it. Their goal is to reduce or discredit the arguments against the terrible reality of the Cuban political prisons of the last 30 years, of constant violations of the most elementary human rights. This strategy includes:

I.a.) Treatment of the sick and infirm in hospitals, by specialists, in some cases without necessity; for example, transporting an orthopedic patient from Cuba to East Germany. On the occasions (so rare we can count them) that the authorities have approved fitting orthopedic shoes, which most of us need, the technician has come to the prison. Now we are told we will have to go to the orthopedic fitting center ourselves because the technician can no longer come here. Most of us need medical help that can only be offered in hospitals that possess a certain professional level, but we are surprised and alerted by this recent treatment at these hospitals: never before, except in the rarest cases, were we allowed to enjoy the vital right that every man ought to have, to be treated as his condition requires.

Parking of the vehicles that transport us, in central locations, so that the prisoner-patients have them in order to be driven to medical care facilities.

Offering us a cold drink as though the Ministry regarded it as their obligation to provide such, upon arrival at these facilities;

Official insistence that we wear civilian clothes, not pajamas such as we have been given until now. At the same time there is an official refusal of our right to wear civilian clothing permanently, as befits political prisoners;

I.b.) Delivery of some of us to our homes to see family members who, because of handicaps or other impediments, are unable to visit us in the prison [not clear; but seems to be "a procedure"] followed, not even in cases involving serious illness or death of a parent or child. We want to make clear that at one time or another a prisoner was taken in the nick of time to visit a very ill family member, or to spend a few moments with the cadaver of same, as a result of the "spirit of dialogue."

II.) Introduction of hidden photographic equipment in briefcases, tools, clothing, in our area, in order to take note of us and our living quarters. This concealed activity, designed to record us on film at any cost, reached its most extreme manifestation in February, when captain Raul Rodriguez, who began working in our area just a few days earlier, brought a camera in a briefcase that he had carried with him on other occasions. Mr. Rodriguez approached Lt. Montarro, the officer responsible for our section. One of our comrades could see clearly how Captain Rodriguez aimed the camera in the direction of a prisoner to whom another soldier was demonstrating the function of the microphone of a portable radio (property of Captain Rodriguez). That same day, in the patio surrounded by walls and [indecipherable] for us on the flat roof of the building we occupy, the soldiers took or tried to take photos or films of all of us that were gathered there. These events were reported in protest to Major Manuel Sanchez, sub-director of the prison in charge of political prisoners. Major Sanchez did not deny the facts, but he assured us they would not recur. Lt. Montarro, present, admitted that Captain Rodriguez had carried out certain "strange manipulations" unbeknownst to him, trying thus to pretend ignorance in front of us, of the secret activities that we had detected.

All of our fears and suspicions are founded upon the machinations and maneuvers that we live through daily, that seem very similar to those employed during the 1979 farce, when the so-called "dialogue" unfolded, in the shadow of which political prisoners were liberated. What **is** not known is what happened to the rest of us, and how many years before our terrible reality is brought to the attention of world public opinion.

The photographs and films taken in this "theater" designed by the regime would serve to project a false image of our presidium before the conference in Geneva or any other such gathering. Thus, **we refuse to be filmed or photographed.**

We believe that **this document will assist you and the delegation over which you preside with dignity and merit, to expose the false arguments that the Castro delegation presents about our actual reality supported by films and photos prepared by the Ministry of Interior, for the 44th Human Rights Conference of the UN.**

We recognize you **as our brotherly and genuine representative. We are the members of the historic Cuban political presidium of plantados.**

"The world is to reveal the truth, not **to** conceal it."

Jose Marti
Prison of Habana del Este
City of Habana
Cuba