

TAKE ACTION: Please cut and paste this letter onto your personal or Institutional letterhead expressing deep concern for the health of writer Normando Hernández González.

15 December 2006

Raúl Castro Ruz
Presidente interino (Interim President)
La Habana, Cuba
Fax: +011 53 7 8333085

Excellency,

I wish to add my name to this appeal from PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of the international writers' organization, International PEN. PEN Canada is writing to express its deep concern about the deteriorating health of **Normando Hernández González**.

According to the most recent information at our disposal, alarm for Hernández's well-being has increased in recent days when his wife reported to human rights activists in early December that her husband has been transferred to a provincial hospital in Camagüey after suffering further health complications. He is reported to have mal-absorption syndrome, a disease of the intestine causing difficulties in absorbing nutrients that carries with it acute conditions such as malnutrition, heart disease and anaemia. As a result Hernandez has reportedly lost around 16 kilos of body weight, and there are growing fears that he may die in detention.

Hernández was arrested in his hometown of Camagüey, Central Cuba, along with 74 others considered to be dissidents by the Cuban government. Hernández, then 33, was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment under Article 91 of the Cuban Criminal Code for reporting on the conditions of state-run services in Cuba and for criticizing the government's management of issues such as tourism, agriculture, fishing and cultural affairs. Since his arrest, there have been consistent reports of abuse, appalling prison conditions and denial of medical attention. Among them is that in the early months of his imprisonment, Hernández was kept in solitary confinement and allowed only four hours of sunlight a week, no access to television or radio, and extremely restricted communication with his family. Reports also suggest that he has been given only polluted water and inadequate food and offered only the most basic medical services.

In 2004, Hernández was transferred to Kilo 5½ prison in Pinar del Río, over 400 miles from his home and family. There he is said to have been denied access to the outside world in any form, and forced to share a small, filthy cell with insects, rodents and prisoners considered dangerous or mentally unstable.

PEN Canada is alarmed at the reports of the deteriorating health of Normando Hernández González and that there are fears that he may die in detention. We therefore urge the Cuban authorities to provide, as a matter of urgency, all necessary medical attention to him. In addition, PEN Canada requests the immediate release of all writers and journalists held in Cuban prisons in violation of their right to freedom of expression as recognized in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

Copies to:

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Please send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

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