

Fariñas's Martyrdom

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At noon on January 31, 2006, Guillermo Fariñas Hernández (Cubanacán Press), an independent journalist with a bachelor's degree in psychology, declared that he would go on a hunger and thirst strike to protest against the government prohibition of internet access. Fariñas used to send his work outside the country through Cyber-cafés which provided access to the internet in Cuba if payment was made in hard currency. However, the Cuban government blocked the websites and left the independent journalist without communication with foreign countries.

Just 48 hours after he began his tenth hunger strike, Fariñas stated to the Puente Informativo Cuba-Miami "I feel I have no power to transmit to the world what they are doing with our brothers, and the only thing I have left to do is go on a hunger strike and demand that they provide me with internet connectivity as those privileged ones of the regime have, or to give up my life in the task."

Fariñas had been in jail for reading the Varela Project¹ out loud in an assembly of his electoral jurisdiction (Santa Clara, 250 kilo-



Fariñas prior to the hunger strike



Fariñas during the hunger strike

meters east of Havana), but he was on parole since December 2003. Short of completing four months of hunger strike, a representative of the Cuban telecommunications monopoly (ETECSA) offered Fariñas partial internet access, but he refused it. The State Security Major Vladimir Ernesto Méndez then notified Fariñas that the Cuban government would never give him full internet access.

Fariñas has been hospitalized in the Intensive Care Unit of the Arnaldo Milián hospital in Santa Clara since February 8, 2006. In addition, he already needed emergency surgery on May 23, 2006, as a consequence of a stroke. The left side of his body is paralyzed. His mother, Alicia Hernández, told *Reporters Without Frontiers* (Reporteros Sin Fronteras) that he is in stable, but critical condition.

Under pressure from his family and medical personnel, Fariñas gave consent to be fed intravenously on February 9, 2006; however, his health continues to worsen. The Inter American Press Society (Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa) and Reporters Without Frontiers (Reporteros Sin Fronteras) who have been following this case constantly, express their concern for Fariñas' health and they credit and pay tribute to him for risking his life to defend the right to information.

Fariñas has repeated: "I want them to cease the attacks toward independent journalists. I want for all Cubans to have internet access if the government can provide it for them, as was stated by the Information Society World Summit (Tunisia, December 2005). I'm willing to die. Fidel Castro knows my situation."

NOTES

1- The Varela Project proposes a popular consultation, constitutionally supported by over 11,000 signatures. Its five fundamental proposals are: a) amnesty for political prisoners; b) freedom of speech; c) freedom of independent association; d) freedom of developing independent corporations; e) the reform of current electoral laws.