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NEWS RELEASE

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CUBAN DISSIDENT'S DEATH SYMPTOMATIC OF DEEP ROT IN CUBA

—for immediate release—

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MISSISSAUGA—The Christian Labour Association of Canada is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining political prisoners in Cuba, including 10 independent trade unionists.

CLAC, which was responsible for bringing a Cuban dissident Pedro Pablo Alvarez Ramos to Canada to speak with Minister Peter Kent last spring, is saddened, but not surprised by the recent death of Orlando Zapata, a political prisoner since 2003.

"When our trade union colleague spoke with Minister Kent last year, he made clear that prison conditions were horrendous" says Brian Dijkema, chair of CLAC International. "He spoke of abuse by guards and fellow prisoners, severe lack of nutrition, and a complete absence of sanitation."

"Such conditions leave the prisoners -- who are there for no reason other than wanting to exercise basic rights and freedoms -- desperate and without hope. The Cuban government should make the courageous move of releasing them immediately and without condition."

CLAC also calls for the Prime Minister of Canada to personally take a role in seeking the prisoners' release. "We know that Minister Kent's recent meeting with Cuban officials resulted in tremendous good will from the Cuban government" says Dijkema, referencing a high level visit to Cuba last November. "Now is the time for our government to cash in on that good will in support of human rights."

CLAC International has been seeking the release of over 200 political prisoners in Cuba since 2004 when 12 independent trade unionists were arrested in the "Black Spring" of 2003.

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