

Reporters Without Borders' Lies about Cuba

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On May 20, 2009, Reporters Without Borders (RWB) published a statement on Cuba declaring that “anyone can browse the internet...unless they are Cuban.” To support its claim, RWB offered a videotaped scene filmed in a hotel with a hidden camera in which a Cuban is denied internet access. The organization goes on to assert that “in Cuba an internet user can be sentenced to 20 years in jail if s/he publishes a counterrevolutionary article on a website (article 91), and 5 years if s/he connects to the web illegally.” Lastly, RWB points out that “Cuba is the second largest prison in the world for journalists, after China,” reminding readers that there are “19 detained ... under the false pretext that they are ‘mercenaries paid by the United States.’” 1

Confronting RWB with its own contradictions is easy. In reality, at the same time the organization asserts that no Cuban can connect to the web, it provides a link to the blog of Yoani Sanchez, who lives in Cuba and who openly uses the internet to oppose the government in Havana. How is it that Sanchez manages to express herself if not via access to the internet? Her last blog post is dated May 27, 2009. In addition, she posted on May 25, 23, 22, 19, 18, 16, 15, 13, 10, 9, 7, 6, 4, and 2 as well as on April 29, 28, 27, 26, 25, 23, and 21. Thus, during the month preceding the publication of RWB’s statement about internet access in Cuba, Yoani Sanchez was able to connect to the web – from Cuba – at least 18 times. 2

In publication after publication, RWB continually contradicts itself. Thus, in a March 2008 report about independent journalists in Cuba, the Paris-based organization emphasized that “Yoani Sanchez’s blog is on the website DesdeCuba.com, which includes five bloggers and has a six-person editorial committee. Its objective is simply to comment on the country’s political situation. In February 2009 after its first anniversary, the site claims to have exceeded 1.5 million hits, 800,000 of which were on the Generation Y blog. Even more impressive, 26% of the site’s visitors live in Cuba, in third position behind the United States and Spain.” 3 How can the “26% of readers who are Cuban” visit Sanchez’s blog if their access to the internet is prohibited? 4

At the same time, RWB used the isolated case of a hidden camera in a Cuban hotel to generalize about a prohibition on internet access on the entire island as well as to denigrate the Cuban authorities. Ironically, in her post on May 23, 2009, Yoani Sanchez wrote that with “a dozen bloggers we did a study of more than 40 hotels in Havana. With the exception of the Miramar West, all said that they were unaware of a regulation prohibiting Cubans from accessing the internet”. Thus, the western media’s preferred Cuban blogger dramatically contradicted RWB’s allegations. 5

RWB claims that any person who publishes an article critical of the Cuban government risks 20 years of imprisonment, citing as evidence article 91, without further elaboration on the

matter. So what does article 91 of the Cuban Penal Code say? Here it is in its entirety: "Anyone who, in the interest of a foreign State, carries out an act with the intention of damaging the independence of the Cuban State or its territorial integrity will incur a penalty of imprisonment for ten to twenty years or by death." As is evident, RWB does not hesitate in the least to blatantly lie. The section of Cuban law in question does not prohibit in any way internet publication of heterodox analysis. Nor does it limit in any way freedom of expression. It does penalize acts of treason against the state. 6

This would be equivalent to accusing the government of Nicolas Sarkozy of repression of web surfers in France by applying article 411-2 of the French Penal Code ("handing over troops belonging to the French armed forces, or all or part of the national territory, to a foreign power, to a foreign organization or to an organization under foreign control, or to their agents is punishable by life imprisonment and a fine of 750,000 Euros.") or article 411-4 ("The act of sharing intelligence with a foreign power, an enterprise or organization that is foreign or under foreign control or with its agents, with the aim of provoking hostilities or acts of aggression against France, shall be punished with thirty years of criminal detention and a fine of 450,000 Euros. The same penalties shall apply to the act of providing to a foreign power, an enterprise or organization that is foreign or under foreign control or its agents, the means to undertake hostilities or realize acts of aggression against France.") 7

That said, it is evident upon viewing Yoani Sanchez's blog, which is extremely critical of the Cuban authorities, or reading the writings of other government opponents, that the Paris-based organization's accusation is unsupported. RWB also states that Cubans risk up to "five years if they illegally connect to the web." Here the French organization limits itself to making a flat statement without even bothering to refer to a section of the law which, as it turns out, does not exist. Once again, RWB resorts to a lie.

Lastly, RWB continues in the same vein, assuring us that the "19 detained" journalists are jailed "under the false pretext of being 'mercenaries paid by the United States.'" The organization is incapable of coherence and rigor in its own publications. In reality, the French language version of the same article refers to "24 media professionals." 8 But the numbers matter little. Once again, there is a double deception. On the one hand, one of the "19 detainees" that RWB referred to, actually has a journalistic background: Oscar Elías Biscet. The 18 others had never practiced the profession before joining the world of the dissidents. On the other hand, these individuals were never penalized for distributing subversive intellectual material, but rather for accepting the financial inducements offered by Washington, and, as a result, went from being opponents of the government to being paid agents of a foreign power, thereby committing a serious crime punished not only by Cuban law but also by the Penal Code of every country in the world. The evidence is abundant. The United States admits that it finances Cuba's internal opposition and its own official documents prove it. The dissidents admit to receiving monetary aid from Washington and even Amnesty International admits that the jailed individuals were sentenced "for having received funds or materials from the U.S. government to carry out activities that the authorities consider subversive and detrimental to Cuba." 9

RWB lacks credibility given that its agenda is first and foremost political and ideological. The contradictions and manipulations of the Paris-based organization are readily uncovered and proven. Moreover, RWB can make no claim to legitimacy given that it acknowledges receiving funds from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which, according to a

1997 New York Times report, is a CIA front “created 15 years ago to carry out publicly what the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) did clandestinely for decades.” 10

Article in french, [Les mensonges de Reporters sans frontières sur le Venezuela](#), 21 of June, 2009.

Translated by David Brookbank.

Notes

1 *Reporters Without Borders*, «‘Cualquiera puede navegar por Internet...salvo los cubanos’», May 20, 2009. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=31383 (website consulted on May 20, 2009).

2 Yoani Sánchez, *Generación Y*. <http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/> (website consulted on May 24, 2009).

3 Claire Vœux, *Cuba. Cuba. Cinco años después de la “Primavera negra”, los periodistas independientes resisten, Reporteros Sin Fronteras*, March 2008. http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Informe_Cuba.pdf (website consulted on May 20, 2009).

4 *Reporters Without Borders*, «Cuba: informe 2008», http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=26080 (website consulted on May 20, 2009).

5 Yoani Sánchez, «‘Sentada’ blogger», *Generación Y*, May 23, 2009. <http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/> (website consulted on May 27, 2009).

6 Ley n° 62, Código Penal de Cuba, Libro II, Artículo 91, December 29, 1987. <http://www.acnur.org/biblioteca/pdf/4417.pdf> (website consulted on May 24, 2009).

7 Code Pénal Français, Partie législative, Livre IV, Titre 1er, Chapitre 1er, Sections 1 & 2.

8 *Reporters Without Borders*, «‘N’importe qui peut naviguer sur Internet... sauf s’il est cubain’», May 20, 2009. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=31379 (website consulted on May 26, 2009).

9 *Amnesty International*, «Cuba. Cinq années de trop, le nouveau gouvernement doit libérer les dissidents emprisonnés», March 18, 2008. <http://www.amnesty.org/fr/for-media/press-releases/cuba-cinq-ann%C3%A9es-de-trop-le-nouveau-gouvernement-doit-lib%C3%A9rer-les-dissid>(website consulted on April 23, 2008).

10 Salim Lamrani, *Cuba. Ce que les médias ne vous diront jamais* (Paris: Editions Estrella, 2009).

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