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Dr. Juan Escalona Reguera
Attorney General of the Republic
San Rafael 3
La Habana, Cuba

Dear Attorney General:

Our Association and its more than 345,000 member lawyers have a deep commitment to the preservation of the rule of law in the international community. In particular, we seek to encourage the maintenance of judicial systems which are independent from government interference, and which respect the independence of judges and lawyers in order to maintain internationally recognized standards of fairness and justice. These principles are embodied in a "Rule of Law Resolution" adopted by the Association's House of Delegates in February 1975.

Pursuant to that resolution, I am writing to you to express our deep concern regarding the harassment of Dr. Rene Gomez Manzano.

Dr. Rene Gomez Manzano, an attorney who has represented many dissidents, was arrested on February 18, 1996, and held at police headquarters for three days. He was briefly re-detained February 24, 1996. In April, 1995, when he and several other attorneys who also handle political cases were holding a meeting, several individuals broke in, assaulted the attorneys, and threatened further assaults if they continued "defending criminals." We have been informed that this incident was an "acto de repudio" carried out at the instigation of the authorities. It is our understanding that Dr. Gomez was expelled from his collective law office in October 1995, after criticizing the leadership of the National Assembly of Lawyers' Collectives.

Pursuant to his representation of dissidents, Dr. Gomez has criticized the fairness of certain recent political trials. Moreover, he has endeavored to establish an independent association of lawyers; the Ministry of Justice has refused to register such an association.

These facts, if our information is correct, reflect serious violations of the rule of law in Cuba. The independence of judges and lawyers is fundamental to maintaining the international norms of equal justice and due process enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and other international human rights instruments.

We respectfully urge that your government immediately take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of Dr. Gomez. We also respectfully urge that the harassment of Dr. Gomez cease, and that the independent lawyers' association be permitted.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Cooper Ramo', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Roberta Cooper Ramo

cc: The Honorable Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
His Excellency Roberto Robaina Gonzalez
His Excellency Fernando Prumirez
National Union of Cuban Jurists