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Black Panthers In Cuba Cite Arrests By Castro

HAVANA (AP) — An American Black Panther said today he and other members of his party have been "isolated and imprisoned" in Cuba and they want to leave. He implied that Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver is among the discontented.

Raymond Johnson, 22, of Alexandria, Va., told a newsman he was instructed by a high-ranking Panther in Cuba to report this feeling.

Johnson, who described himself as a lieutenant in the Black Panther movement and an airliner hijacker, said: "The Panthers have not been received in a revolutionary fashion. We have been condemned to live in Cuba."

He added that members of the black militant organization had been imprisoned, isolated, banned from Havana and told they could not organize their party in Cuba.

"These imprisonments amount to more than just being confined for a period of investigation," Johnson said.

"Some have been imprisoned a second time. They have been sent to completely isolated sections of the island and forced to work in labor camps."

Johnson said he expected to be arrested at any time, adding: "It is possible some of the Panthers will be arrested today."

The Panther said arrests "always come when they (the Panthers) become disenchanted and after they protest conditions and express a desire to leave the country."

"We would like this information to reach the Black Panther

party in the United States so the party will know the unrevolutionary way we are being treated," he said. "We want them to protest at Cuban missions everywhere."

The only Cuban mission in the United States is at the United Nations.

Johnson said he was jailed for 21 days after he hijacked a National Airlines jet from New Orleans to Havana on Nov. 4, 1968.

"We think there's racial discrimination in Cuba," he said. "It's a peculiar kind of racial discrimination. In some ways it's comparable to attitudes in the United States. White Cubans have a subconscious conspiracy to maintain control of the island."

"We feel the Cubans have a misunderstanding of the political, cultural and revolutionary thinking of black Americans, but primarily of the cultural aspect of the black revolution."

"We are talking about a social and cultural revolution. And in our experience, we have seen people here lagging in the revolution of the mind."

A former student at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., Johnson said the Black Panthers had been discouraged from talking to black Cubans about black awareness and the wearing of Afro hair styles.

"We found this is completely repressed by Cuba. We have talked to a number of Cuban women and they have started wearing natural hair styles. But to relate to one's African heritage in Cuba is looked down on."

More than 30 per cent of Cuba's 8 million people are

black.

Johnson claimed that some Panthers who have talked black culture to Cubans have been branded counterrevolutionaries, one of communism's most serious crimes.

He said most of the Panthers would like to go to Africa, but they have been told not to contact African embassies in Havana.

Johnson also said Omar Talif, a party member from New York, and his American wife and child "disappeared" after being told by Cuban officials they were "black racists."

Johnson said he did not know how many Black Panthers currently are in Cuba but he identified four:

Byron Muese Booth of Los Angeles, Calif., deputy minister of defense; Earl Farrow of Denver, Colo., deputy minister of information; Charles Rhaim Smith of Los Angeles, and Lt. James Akili and his wife of New York.

Johnson said all the Panthers he knows have requested permission to leave Cuba. He turned aside questions about Cleaver on security grounds, but added: "An exceedingly high-ranking Black Panther officer doesn't like the treatment of black revolutionaries and the Black Panthers here at all."

In Miami, the FBI said Johnson was one of the more "vicious" of the hijackers.

"He called the passengers 'economic devils' and stood over the captain throughout the flight, continually hitting him over the head with a cocked .38 revolver," an FBI agent said.