On Campus

Cuban Dissident Blogger Honored by Columbia

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From her home in Havana, Yoani Sánchez maintains a political blog that few Cubans can access because of government censorship. Yet her blog, *Generación Y*, is read by 14 million people worldwide, translated into 15 languages, and was named by *Time* magazine as 1 of the 25 best blogs of 2009.

In October, Sánchez was given a Maria Moors Cabot Prize special citation from the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. The Cabot Prizes customarily go to journalists who cover Latin America and the Caribbean. Sánchez is the first blogger to receive the honor; she accepted her citation in absentia as Cuban authorities denied her permission to leave.

On her blog, Sánchez offers sardonic commentary about the hardships of day-to-day life in Cuba. She also fires stinging rebukes about Fidel Castro’s failed policies and

his propensity to blame the United States for domestic problems. “If in a maternity hospital cockroaches crawled on the walls,” she wrote in one post, “it was the fault of the North Americans.”

The Cabot board, in its citation, said Sánchez “pursues her craft with ingenuity, scarce resources and an enormous amount of guts.”

The other 2009 Cabot Prize winners are Anthony DePalma of the *New York Times*, Christopher M. Hawley of *USA Today* and the *Arizona Republic*, and Merval Pereira of *O Globo.*

Sánchez is being punished for speaking out, she says. On November 6, she alleges, she was abducted and brutally beaten in Havana by men she suspects were government authorities. Cuban officials have not issued any statements about the incident, which made international headlines after Sánchez blogged about it. A few days later, President Barack Obama ’83CC participated in an e-mail interview with Sánchez, answering several questions about U.S.-Cuban relations.

The U.S. State Department issued a statement saying it “strongly deplored” the attack. An open letter from Nicholas Lemann, dean of the journalism school and Henry R. Luce Professor of Journalism, said, “We call on Cuba’s leadership to investigate what happened to her and punish those responsible.”



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