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Christians call on the regime to respect freedom of religion

Evangelical Focus (22.11.2023) - In its third gathering, the Alliance of Christians of Cuba urged authorities to release political prisoners and respect basic human rights. The Alliance of Christians of [Cuba](#) (ACC), which brings together around 50 religious leaders from several Christian denominations in the country, recently held its third national gathering in the city of Santiago.

Petitions and commitments

At the end of the event, they issued a joint statement, with three requests to the Cuban government. Firstly, "the [liberation of all those imprisoned](#) for exercising their inherent rights".

Secondly, that "each religious movement on the island might exercise its [right to associate](#), obtaining legal status and protection under the law". Thirdly, that the government "respects the right of each Cuban citizen to exercise all their inherent rights and that they do not [persecute](#) them for this".

On their part, the members of ACC committed to "work for the healing of wounds in our damaged nation, divided by a failed social project", and thus "create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect and compassion between Cubans on the island and in the diaspora".

"We work and will work to advocate for more political economic, [religious](#) and social freedoms so that all Cubans can live in dignity and self-determination", they added.

All this, from "a basis of faith in the importance of [family life](#), the inherent value of all human beings, the respect for rule of law, appreciation for education, the promotion of social justice, and the help for those in need, which form part of the foundation of Christian humanism", stressed the ACC.

Moreover, the faith leaders stated that "as Christians and Cuban citizens we bless and honour the nation of [Israel](#) and condemn, wholeheartedly, the acts of terrorism committed against that nation".

International support

Anna Lee Stangl, head of advocacy of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said the group stands with the Alliance of Christians in Cuba and "their call for real reforms to protect and uphold freedom of religion or belief and associated rights and for the release of all political prisoners".

She underlined the courage the church leaders had to organise such a gathering and publish the declaration despite harassment and threats of the regime.

CSW urges the Cuban government to “make the changes that have been called for”, and the international community to “closely monitor and engage with religious leaders, in their efforts to promote democratic values and respect for fundamental [human rights](#)”.

Documented religious freedom violations more than double in 2022

***'Freedoms, like privileges, prevail or are imperiled together. You cannot harm or strive to achieve one without harming or furthering all.'* - Jose Marti**

[CSW](#) (06.02.2023) – **Christian Solidarity Worldwide's [new report](#) on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Cuba, published today, finds that documented FoRB violations more than doubled from [2021](#) to 2022.**

Violations include but are not limited to harassment, [arbitrary detention](#), restrictions on movement and travel, prevention from attending religious services, confiscation of goods and property, and attacks on social media.

The [report](#) documents 657 violations of FoRB in 2022, and describes it as a ‘staggering jump from 272 in the previous year’. Notably, this increase was documented despite the fact that all of CSW’s documenters were forced into exile over the course of the year due to continuing threats and harassment.

This increase in FoRB violations is a continuation of the government crackdown that began in 2021 following the [11 July protests](#), and it has affected religious associations of all types, including both registered and unregistered groups from the Afro-Cuban, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.

As in previous years, the Office for Religious Affairs (ORA) remains primarily responsible for these violations, and maintains a consistently antagonistic relationship with religious groups despite the creation of the new government Department for Attention to Religious Institutions and Fraternal Groups in March 2022.

The report suggests that the situation is likely to deteriorate further following the adoption of a [new criminal code](#) which came into force on 1 December 2022 and will amplify the government’s ability to crack down on religious leaders, especially those associated with unregistered groups. In addition, a [new family code](#) is due to be implemented in 2023 which strengthens the ability of the government to force religious leaders and others into compliance using the threat of the removal of their children if their parent or guardian is perceived as insufficiently supportive of the authorities.

In this context, the report details a historic wave of emigration in which hundreds of thousands of Cubans have fled the island since July 2021 to seek sanctuary elsewhere. Some church leaders and FoRB defenders were forced to leave under threats of imprisonment and the loss of their children including [Ricardo Fernández Izaguirre](#), independent journalist [Yoel Suárez](#), and Apostolic Movement leader [Alain Toledano Valiente](#).

The report concludes: ‘It is now even more vital that governments around the world, and especially Cuba’s friends and neighbours in Latin America, emphatically voice concerns about Cuba’s consistent violations of human rights including FoRB and seek ways to support independent civil society in Cuba, including religious groups. The European Union

and the United States, for their part, must actively seek ways to coordinate with each other and engage with other governments, especially those in the Western Hemisphere, to ensure that demands that the Cuban government make long overdue reforms to ensure that the fundamental rights of all are protected and upheld are made consistently and in unison. Ultimately the future of Cuba lies with its people; those around the world who believe in the principles of democracy and fundamental human rights must stand with them in their peaceful pursuit of political and social change.'

CSW's Head of Advocacy Anna Lee Stangl said: ***'The situation for freedom of religion or belief deteriorated once again in Cuba in 2022, and without significant and concerted international intervention this trend is likely to continue into 2023. Despite this, we are heartened by the many religious leaders and human rights defenders on and outside of the island who continue to speak publicly on FoRB and other violations. We stand with them, and urge the international community to do the same by taking heed of the recommendations contained within this report and holding the Cuban Communist Party to account for its decades-long mistreatment of religion and belief groups in the country.'***

Note to Editors:

1. [Click here to download the full report as a PDF.](#)