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Report finds return to hardline tactics

CSW (14.03.2024) - **CSW has today published its latest [annual report](#) on the situation of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Cuba which observes that the government is returning to hardline tactics in its efforts to assert control over independent civil society, including religious groups.**

The number of documented violations of FoRB remained steady, with 622 recorded in 2023 compared to 657 in 2022, which had more than [doubled](#) from 272 in 2021. As in 2022, the persisting severity of the crackdown throughout 2023 relates to the government's efforts to bring the population under its control following the [nationwide protests](#) of 11 July 2021. Registered and unregistered groups regularly experience FoRB violations and religion or belief groups of all types are affected, including Afro-Cuban, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.

Unregistered religious groups continue to be a particular target. Protestant Christians and leaders of independent Afro-Cuban religious groups report regular harassment and threats, as well as the regular interruption of their services and rituals at the hands of government officials. Most of these leaders point out that they do not choose to operate illegally, but the government has denied repeated requests to register and to designate authorised locations for them to practice their faith.

Adults and children associated with registered and unregistered religious groups regularly experience discrimination because of their faith. A number of documented cases involved adults being sacked from their place of employment, or demoted due to their association with a religious group or religious leader that the government has labeled 'counter-revolutionary.' Protestant Christian and Jehovah's Witness children were subjected to verbal, psychological and physical abuse in primary schools due to their refusal to participate in pro-government 'patriotic' activities, including pledging loyalty to Che Guevara, Fidel and Raul Castro, and to communism, because of a conflict with their religious beliefs. In one case, a 15-month-old was denied entry to the community day-care because the child's parents are leaders of an unregistered church.

The government has particularly targeted political prisoners, their families, and religious leaders close to them. Political prisoners are routinely denied the right to keep a Bible or other religious literature or to receive visits from a religious leader in violation of the Nelson Mandela Rules for political prisoners (the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners). Religious leaders have come under pressure to bar the close family members of political prisoners from their places of worship, and in some cases have succumbed to such demands. Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian religious leaders who resist government pressure and continue to offer spiritual support to the family members of political prisoners are harassed and regularly threatened.

Among the political prisoners are a number of religious leaders imprisoned on and following the 11 July 2021 protests, including Protestant pastor Reverend Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo and Afro-Cuban religious leaders Loreto Hernández García and Donaida

Perez Paseiro. All reported consistent violations of FoRB and other human rights in prison.

CSW's Head of Advocacy Anna Lee Stangl said: ***'The Cuban government is creating a new version of its repressive past, with the apparent support of similarly repressive governments of China and Russia. The international community cannot allow this to happen; it must emphatically voice concerns about the consistent violation of human rights including the right to freedom of religion or belief in Cuba, and do all it can to strengthen and support independent civil society on the island. CSW remains deeply inspired by the many Cuban religious leaders and human rights defenders who continue to report on and document violations of freedom of religion or belief despite the risks that come with that. We reiterate our solidarity with these brave individuals and indeed all Cubans struggling under the repressive tactics of their own government.'***

Note to Editors:

1. [Click here to download CSW's new report on Cuba as a PDF.](#)
 2. Despite the 2022 creation of the new government Department for Attention to Religious Institutions and Fraternal Groups, in practice, religious leaders have told CSW that all business continues to be conducted by the Office for Religious Affairs (ORA) of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), which, along with the Department of State Security (DSE) and the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) remains primarily responsible for these violations.
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