

Statement by Reverend Alida Leon Baez
President of the Evangelical League of Cuba
15 July 2019

My name is Alida León Baez, I represent the Cuban religious association the Evangelical League of Cuba of which I am president and pastor. The church has been duly registered in Cuba since 1954.

I first wish to express my thanks for the official invitation that the organizers of the event sent me. I appreciate the opportunity and the privilege of being included in the list of participants. However, I regret that I will not be able to attend.

On the morning of this Sunday, July 14, 2019, I was preparing to travel on the flight that would take me to Washington from Havana, Cuba. As I passed through immigration on my way to the boarding gate, I was notified by an immigration agent that I am not permitted to leave territory of the nation. There was no explanation, there were no reasons given. They stated that if I felt dissatisfied with this decision I could enter a complaint with the corresponding authorities in the next few days.

Unhappy but with no alternative in the face of such a decision, I returned home. I am now preparing to file a complaint and request explanations from the public administration. According to the Immigration Law in my country, of everyone who lives in the national territory, the only people who are not allowed to leave Cuba are those who are subject to criminal proceedings or in cases of concern for defense and national security or reasons of public utility.

I do not believe that this is my case. I do not have any pending judicial processes against me. I do not consider myself a threat to the security and defense of the country where I was born and live. And if there was even a minimum reason of public utility, I think that one should be notified about it in advance and given enough time to allow me the opportunity to defend myself; not waiting until the last very last minute to inform me of this decision.

I cannot conceive of a country where the inalienable right to move freely can be limited without determining causes and without adequate notification in terms of time. Even the worst criminals are notified of accusations against them and informed that there will be a trial before they arrive at a court.

In conclusion, I just want to share my background of the years of service to God and my church. I was ordained in 1982 with my husband the Reverend Alejandro Nieto Selles to lead the church over which I preside today. From a small church that we pastored in Havana, we have now reached a figure of more than 30,000 congregated throughout Cuba in more than 200 churches. Ten years ago I suffered the death of my husband and the only decision I have up to now is to live entirely dedicated to my ideals as a faithful follower of Christ and in favor of the Church in Cuba. Of course, this story has always been accompanied by questions and battles with the Cuban authorities in the struggle to advance our work.

My wish is for this event to be one more step in history for the advance of religious freedom in the world, where there will be no discrimination because one possesses and expresses a faith.