

Introduction

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all. This joint submission, together with Impulso18, focuses on the situation of FoRB in Cuba ahead of the country's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
2. During the reporting period, religious associations of all types, including Afro-Cuban, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant and Roman Catholic groups, registered and unregistered groups, including those belonging to the Cuba Council of Churches (CCC), all reported FoRB violations. Religious leaders and individuals who offered spiritual or material support to families of political prisoners were particularly targeted. A new slate of increasingly repressive laws further sought to bring the population under government control. While some Cubans appear more cautious or have seen no other option than to go into exile, there remain many who, even in the face of threats, harassment, and the possibility of imprisonment, continue to speak out against injustice.

Recommendations from previous cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

3. During its third UPR Cuba received 356 recommendations, of which 226 were supported and 130 noted.¹ Cuba accepted all four FoRB-specific recommendations, calling on the government to 'continue to promote the full right to freedom of religion', to guarantee 'the right of everyone to freedom of worship and not to profess any religion, in accordance with the Constitution', 'to foster good relations with the different religious institutions', and finally to 'continue advocating in the international fora for the need to combat Islamophobia and discriminatory stereotypes based on religion, particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism.'² Unfortunately, despite a commitment to implement these recommendations, CSW has continued to receive reports of FoRB violations and a continuing crackdown on religious or belief groups.
4. In addition, CSW regrets Cuba's decision to note multiple recommendations to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Rome Statute, to ensure the right to a fair trial, and recommendations to cease the practice of harassment, threats and arbitrary and pre-trial detention or house arrests of journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs), and those exercising their right to freedom of assembly and association through peaceful protest, and freedom of expression. We were further concerned by Cuba's failure to commit to improving 'transparency and due process in the justice system by ensuring that arrested individuals are promptly informed of the reasons, have access to legal representation of their choosing, are afforded public hearings within a reasonable timeframe, and are presumed innocent until proven guilty', as recommended by Canada.³

Current situation

Legislative restrictions to FoRB

5. Following a referendum, Cuba adopted a new constitution in February 2019. It sets out specific and basic guarantees regarding FoRB (Articles 15 and 57). Article 42 also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religious belief. In addition, in contrast to the 1992 constitution, freedom of conscience is now covered separately in Article 54. A clause making it illegal to invoke conscientious objection with the 'intention of evading compliance with the law' is problematic as it applies to the principle of conscientious objection to obligatory military service.
6. CSW is concerned that the situation for both registered and unregistered groups will deteriorate following the adoption of a new criminal code which came into force on 1 December 2022. The code maintains much of the problematic content of the previous code, including broadly defined crimes used to target religious leaders and FoRB defenders, but increases the minimum sentencing for numerous offences. Penalties for leading or belonging to an unauthorised association were increased from a few months' imprisonment to a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years for a leader and one year for a member. The same sentences are applied for leading or participating in an unauthorised meeting.
7. Article 191 of the new penal code gives the government the right to remove children from their homes if their parents fail to fulfil a list of responsibilities detailed in Article 138 (ñ). These include the duties to instil in their children 'love for the Homeland, respect of its symbols, and respect for the authorities.' In 2022 CSW noted a significant increase in reported FoRB cases which included government threats to remove custodial rights from parents.
8. The new criminal code amplifies the government's ability to crack down on religious leaders, especially those associated with unregistered groups, and together with the limits on conscientious objection in the 2019 constitution⁴, effectively nullifies constitutional guarantees for freedom of conscience.
9. In addition to the criminal code, a new family code which came into force in 2023 also has the potential to strengthen the ability of the government to force religious leaders and others into compliance.
10. CSW has also noted an increase in cases involving the application of Decree Law 370, a law which effectively curtails freedom of expression on the internet in Cuba to guard against 'disseminating information contrary to the common good, morals, decency, and integrity through public data transmission networks.' For example, independent journalist Yoel Suárez who has worked with non-state media outlets in Cuba since 2014 and written extensively about human rights and FoRB issues, received six police summons throughout 2020, including four issued during a national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In one incident on 22

1 United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cuba, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review, A/HRC/39/16/Add.1, 18 September 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/278/05/PDF/G1827805.pdf?OpenElement>

2 Ibid

3 United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cuba, A/HRC/39/16, 11 July 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/210/97/PDF/G1821097.pdf?OpenElement>

4 Conscientious objection may not be invoked with the intention of evading compliance with the law or impeding another from the exercise of their rights.

April 2020, Mr Suárez was ‘visited’ at home by two State Security agents who questioned and threatened him with fines and the seizure of his work under Decree Law 370. During the interrogation, a State Security agent also informed Mr Suárez that he could lose custody of his infant son due to his political beliefs. In addition, Mr Suárez’s mother was summoned three times in 2020 and has been interrogated by state security agents on two occasions.

Office of Religious Affairs (ORA)

11. In March 2022, the government announced the creation of the new Department for Attention to Religious Institutions and Fraternal Groups. In practice, however, religious leaders have told CSW that all business is still conducted by the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) which is part of the Ministry of Justice of the Central Committee of the Cuba Communist Party (CCP). The majority of FoRB violations are perpetrated by the ORA, an entity operating outside of any defined legal framework and offering no recourse for appeal.
12. All religious groups must be registered with the Ministry of Justice in order to operate legally; the ORA, directed by Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello and her deputies Sonia García García and Rober Noa Frómeta, receive the request for the registration and the government then makes the decision. While there are some criteria for registration, for example that the association must have more than 30 members, decisions are made on an arbitrary basis in line with political considerations. As referenced, membership or association with an unregistered group is a crime.
13. While all religious groups experience FoRB violations, unregistered groups are most vulnerable and suffer some of the most egregious violations, as their unregistered status means that their very existence, as well as anything they attempt to do as a religious group, is illegal.

Violations against religious leaders and FoRB defenders

14. Violations of FoRB in Cuba primarily take the form of threats and harassment against religious leaders, as well as their congregations and families. Reports of violations have increased in parallel with the churches’ outspokenness, and were particularly severe in the weeks leading up to the constitutional referendum. Christian, Masonic and Yoruba leaders were summoned to a meeting with CCP officials in Santiago de Cuba. They were asked how they would instruct their membership to vote. Church and denominational leaders reported receiving phone calls threatening them with arrest and imprisonment if they did not instruct their congregations to vote ‘yes’ in the referendum.
15. In the latter half of 2019 a new grouping of registered religious associations, including some of the largest Protestant denominations on the island, submitted a formal request to register the Cuban Evangelical Alliance (CEA). The demonstration of unity with the creation of the CEA seemed to exacerbate the government’s hostility. Pressure increased on the denominational leaders involved in the CEA’s establishment as the year progressed. They were summoned both individually and as a group, sometimes with additional leaders from their respective denominations, by State Security, the Ministry of Justice and the ORA. The CEA remains unregistered.

16. Throughout the reporting period, CSW received reports of church leaders and FoRB defenders being repeatedly and arbitrarily summoned to appear at local police stations or the State Security unit, where they were interrogated and often threatened with imprisonment. For example, from August to September 2019, Pastor Alain Toledano Valiente, a prominent leader of the unregistered Apostolic Movement in Santiago de Cuba, received 17 separate police summons. This culminated in criminal charges of ‘disobedience’ being lodged against him.
17. Several Roman Catholic Churches across the country led by priests who the government considers to be critical of its policies work reported repeated acts of vandalism with impunity.
18. Leaders of legally recognised religious groups also experienced harassment, including repeated phone calls and texts from State Security, visits to their homes and surveillance outside their home or place of worship. In some cases, the harassment appeared to be carried out by civilians but with the tacit approval of the government.
19. The government continued to monitor and actively interfere in religious activities. In one example, State Security officers detained, interrogated and threatened a number of religious leaders in order to halt plans to hold a special prayer service for the families of political prisoners.
20. In some cases, the authorities made it difficult or impossible for religious groups to hold religious activities by withholding required permits. In one high profile case, the government failed to provide the El Calvario Baptist Church in Old Havana with the obligatory permits to repair and rebuild the historic building after it sustained severe structural damage in a gas explosion on 6 May 2022 that destroyed the adjacent Saratoga Hotel and other nearby residences and buildings.⁵ The government has allowed the congregation, which is part of the legally recognised Baptist Convention of Western Cuba, to meet for religious activities publicly outside the church, as they are unable to use the building and there are no alternative meeting spaces belonging to the same denomination nearby. Meeting in a public space leaves the church and their leadership vulnerable to accusations of illegal assembly.
21. Other religious or belief communities also experienced harassment from the government with the aim of preventing them from holding regular religious services. Police and State Security officers repeatedly interrupted religious services held by a Jewish congregation that the government has refused to allow to register.
22. The government has a long-term policy of recruiting and planting informants in all religious groups. Informants are tasked with monitoring and reporting content of sermons, homilies, and prayers, for example. By their presence, they also act as means of pressurising religious leaders to practice self-censorship. In many cases, the government targets men and women who are already members of a given religious organisation and pressures them, often through threats and blackmail, to become an informant.
23. CSW has also received reports of violence carried out with impunity by paramilitary groups or supposed civilians. One of the most disturbing cases took place

⁵ The Cuban government controls gas utilities, and the military owns the hotel where the explosion occurred, however, unsurprisingly, the government has not assumed responsibility for the damages incurred or provided restitution to those affected.

in June 2022 when unknown individuals kidnapped and tortured the family pet, a cat, of a prominent FoRB defender. The cat returned home with her left eye gouged out and a dislocated jaw. The following day, the FoRB defender received a text message from a blocked number that said, 'If you stay [in Cuba], we will do to you and your family what we did to your cat.'

24. In 2019 CSW noted the increased use of social media to harass and defame religious leaders and FoRB defenders, as well as via anonymous phone calls or text messages, especially those critical of the CCP or its policies. While it is impossible to prove that the government was responsible for these incidents, in the case of the social media attacks, many were originally posted and then shared by accounts that either appear to be fake or belong to people with ties to the government. In one example on 10 November 2022 an account under the name of Gerardo Perez, which has a history of pro-government posts, published a photo of Reverend Daniel Josué Pérez Naranjo and his wife and falsely announced that they had been killed that morning in a car accident. Members of his family and Christian groups across the island immediately responded to reject the information. The pastor's adult son believes the local head of the political police is responsible.
25. CSW has also received multiple reports of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief in the workplace. In one instance, a Jewish man received an 'excellent' rating during a surprise audit at his workplace and one of the auditors privately congratulated him on his work. Several hours later, after all the members of the company had gathered in a meeting room, another auditor informed the assembly that the Jewish employee's 'excellent' rating was being withdrawn because his religious beliefs made him a potential spy. The auditor stated that as his congregation is not recognised by the government he is considered to be a counterrevolutionary. Two months later, the same man was informed by the company board of directors that he had received a sanction from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security which not only meant that he would no longer be employed by the company effective immediately but would also be put on a blacklist and barred from working for any other government company or institution. The man was shown documents which explained that he had been found to be 'ideologically unreliable' due to his religious beliefs which make him 'incompatible with the revolutionary process'.
26. Educational institutions are also responsible for FoRB violations, despite Cuba accepting a recommendation during the last UPR to 'continue to implement policies aimed at fostering a greater culture of respect, tolerance, non-violence and non-discrimination in the education sector'.⁶ In one case, the daughter of a pastor of an unregistered church was informed that she would not be able to carry on with her degree because of the 'inconsistency of her attitude and that of her family with the revolutionary process'. She received a written notification which stated that she was considered to be a 'promoter' of a religion classified as illegal and an enemy of the Cuban state.
27. In April 2019, Cuban pastors Ramón Rigal and Adya Expósito were imprisoned for refusing to send their children to government-run schools because of anti-

religious bullying targeting the children.⁷

28. In late 2019, Olainis Tejada Beltrán's 12-year-old son Liusdan was forbidden by the Cuban educational authorities from entering his school while wearing the Jewish kippah, with the result that he was prevented from continuing his education – both Mr Tejada Beltrán and his son belong to the Sephardic Bnei Anusim community in Nuevitas, Camagüey. As Mr Tejada Beltrán publicly denounced the treatment of his son in the independent media, the Cuban educational authorities created a commission to review his son's situation.
29. Some cases of discrimination involved the withholding of emergency services. On 6 June 2022, Ricardo Fernández Izaguirre, a prominent FoRB defender, went to the emergency room of the Martín Chang Puga Hospital in Nuevitas to request medical attention for an asthma attack. As a police officer stationed at the hospital reception was reviewing Mr Fernández Izaguirre's documents, he made a phone call to a State Security officer who asked to be put on speakerphone. The State Security officer stated: 'You will not receive medical care because you are an enemy of the Revolution and you have spent years discrediting us around the world. Ask that God of yours to take away your asthma or die. We are not responsible for you'. Mr Fernández Izaguirre left the hospital and was later able to receive treatment at home from a member of his faith community who works in the medical profession and was able to obtain the necessary medication.

Dissidents prevented from attending religious services and activities

30. The government continues to forcibly prevent individuals it considers to be dissidents from attending religious activities. Family members of political prisoners were also frequently targeted as part of a long-standing attempt to socially isolate those who are critical of the government.
31. The government continues to particularly target members of the Ladies in White, consistently stopping them from attending Mass on Sundays. Every week since the early 2000s, the Ladies in White have dressed in white, attended Mass and then walked in silence through main streets in their respective cities and towns, in protest of the wrongful imprisonment of their relatives who are being held as political prisoners. The government has responded by attempting to block them from attending Mass and often enforces more extreme treatment.
32. On Sunday 13 February 2022, Mayra García Alvares was detained by State Security officers dressed in civilian clothes. The agents, who did not identify themselves, forced her into a vehicle with private (non-government) plates. She was taken to the psychiatric hospital in Colón where she was confined in an office and threatened that if she continued to attempt to attend Mass, she would be forcibly committed and subjected to electroshock therapy, until she was 'in a vegetative state'. The officers claimed that they would justify the procedure by saying that she had had a nervous breakdown and then took her through the hospital to show her various patients in a catatonic state, before releasing her that afternoon after Mass had ended.

⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cuba, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review, A/HRC/39/16/Add.1, 18 September 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/278/05/PDF/G1827805.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷ CSW, 'Cuban pastor Ramon Rigal and wife face summary trial', 19 April 2019 www.csw.org.uk/2019/04/19/press/4310/article.htm

33. Government agents' attempts to prevent members of the Ladies in White from participating in religious services were not limited to Sunday morning Mass. In one example, on 7 September 2019, María Josefa Acón Sardiña was violently detained as she left her home on the way to attend a Saturday Mass. She was forcibly taken to a secluded location and held in the car with the windows tightly closed, handcuffed and with no access to water or to a bathroom for 24 hours before she was finally freed and made to find her own way home.
34. In some cases, members of the Ladies in White were told explicitly that they were being detained because they are prohibited from attending any religious services. Julia Silvia González Fundora was detained on 6 February 2022 on her way to Mass. She was handcuffed and taken to the Unión de Reyes Police Station where a State Security officer subjected her to an almost six-hour long interrogation during which she was repeatedly threatened. Before releasing her, the officer informed her that because of her involvement with Ladies in White, she has lost the right to ever attend any church again and warned her that if she attempts to do so, she will be violently arrested, and her family will 'suffer the consequences of her attitude'.
35. HRDs defending the Ladies in White have also been targeted. For example, Ricardo Fernández Izaguirre was intercepted by three patrol cars as he left the home of Ladies in White leader Berta de los Ángeles Soler Fernández in Havana on 12 July 2019 where he had been documenting violations of FoRB experienced by members of the Ladies in White. He was searched and handcuffed and taken to an unknown location. He was held in the patrol car, with the windows shut, handcuffed for ten hours and warned to stop visiting the Ladies in White. That afternoon Fernández Izaguirre was handed a 150 peso fine and charged with the crime of 'illegally staying in Havana', even though he had proof that he was transiting through the city on his way to Pinar del Rio. He was told he would be deported to Camagüey but instead was taken to the VIVAC detention centre in Calabazar where he was held incommunicado for four days, after which he was allowed a short call to his wife, who up to that point had no idea what had happened to him. On 19 July he was handcuffed and transported to Camagüey in a prison vehicle. When he arrived in the city of Camagüey, Mr Fernández Izaguirre was taken to the police station on Avellaneda Street, where he was held in a cell, again incommunicado, until he was finally released without charge on the afternoon of 21 July.

COVID-19 and FoRB

36. CSW was concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic would be exploited by the Cuban government to legitimise crackdowns on HRDs, arbitrary detentions or violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief or to undermine transparency and accountability. This fear was realised. While limits on public gatherings due to the pandemic reduced the overall number of direct interactions between religious groups and the Cuban state authorities, the government continued to target the religious sector routinely and systematically.
37. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Cuba, the island was already experiencing chronic shortages of food, medicine, and hygiene supplies, as well as a weak medical infrastructure and rundown, overcrowded housing. The pandemic made these problems more acute. Churches that attempted to distribute food and other basic necessities to the population have experienced opposition from the government, ranging from the confiscation of food and other goods, to threats of accusations of the crime of 'spreading disease'.
38. The authorities have also used COVID-19 restrictions as a pretext for targeting religious leaders. For example, despite suspending their activities and participation in Sunday services in line with COVID-19 restrictions, members of the Ladies in White continued to face harsh treatment at the hands of State Security. Several were threatened and informed they were not allowed to leave their homes because there was no 'truce' between the Ladies in White and the authorities.

July 2021 protests

39. Despite accepting a recommendation during the third UPR cycle to 'publicly acknowledge the role and work of members of civil society and take the necessary steps to ensure that HRDs and members of civil society organizations can exercise their rights to peaceful freedom of expression, assembly and association, in conformity with Cuba's international obligations',⁸ CSW is concerned by the arbitrary detention of individuals during peaceful protests in 2021.
40. In January 2021, the release of the song *Patria y Vida* (Homeland and Life) by a group of Cuban hip-hop artists immediately went viral on social media, becoming a protest anthem for many Cubans and reflecting a widespread desire for social and political change.
41. On 11 July 2021, spontaneous and peaceful protests spread across the island in response to Cuba's ongoing and severe economic crisis and a record surge in coronavirus cases, before expanding to criticisms of the CCP's decades-long hold on power, crackdown on human rights and pro-democracy movement, and management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within hours, thousands of citizens were marching in different towns and cities across the country, chanting 'Patria y Vida', 'Freedom' and 'We are not afraid'. The government responded with violent repression and arbitrary detentions on a massive scale.
42. The majority of those who marched were everyday citizens, including people of different religions or beliefs. CSW received confirmed reports of eight religious leaders who were arbitrarily detained in connection the protests, sometimes violently. Most of these leaders were later released but have faced ongoing harassment and threats of rearrest. However, several religious leaders remain in prison, including independent Protestant pastor Reverend Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, Roman Catholic lay leader Angel Mesa, and Afro-Cuban Association of Free Yorubas religious leaders Loreto Hernández García and Donaida Perez Paseiro. All have reported consistent violations of FoRB in prison, in contravention of the Nelson Mandela Rules, in particular the right to receive religious visits.
43. The most severe case involving a religious leader in relation to the 11 July 2021 protest is that of Reverend Rosales Fajardo. An eyewitness was able to photograph the moment he was detained in a chokehold by a uniformed member of the Black Berets – a Cuban paramilitary force responsible for serious human

⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cuba, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review, A/HRC/39/16/Add.1, 18 September 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/278/05/PDF/G1827805.pdf?OpenElement>

rights violations. Reverend Rosales Fajardo was held incommunicado in Versalles, a State Security facility in the city of Santiago de Cuba until August 2021. He was then transferred to the Boniato Maximum Security Prison where he remained until 24 December 2022. While there, on 20 and 21 December 2021, he was tried and convicted of charges of 'disrespect', 'assault', 'criminal incitement' and 'public disorder'. In May 2022 he and his family were informed that he had been sentenced to seven years in prison, one year less than the eight-year sentence that was initially communicated in a document sent from the Permanent Mission of Cuba in Geneva to the United Nations following a Special Procedure communication to the government on the case. In June 2022, courts upheld the sentence against the pastor following an appeal. He was transferred to La Caoba in Palma Soriano on 24 December 2022. During his time in prison, the pastor has been subjected to FoRB violations, severe beatings and inhumane treatment.

44. Reverend Rosales Fajardo's son, David Rosales Carballo, was present at the protests with his father. The young man – a 17-year-old minor at the time – was detained alongside his father but was eventually separated from him. While he was detained, Mr Rosales Carballo was not given water, and said he and other prisoners survived by drinking a few drops each day from a leaking faucet. He was disappeared for a week, and his mother was forced to sign a document stating that he had been charged with 'disrespect' and 'public disorder' and had to pay a 2,000 peso fine on his behalf. On 18 July 2021 at 11pm, Mr Rosales Carballo returned home. His mother described him as physically unhurt but psychologically traumatised. After his detention, Mr Rosales Carballo was required to check in at the local police station on a weekly basis and has been subjected to harassment and threats by the authorities.
45. On 15 November the government crushed attempts to organise another wave of peaceful protests. State Security agents interrogated and threatened civil society activists and religious leaders in the preceding weeks and put many under surveillance or house arrest.
46. Despite these negative developments, CSW noted that many religious leaders – from registered and unregistered groups alike – spoke out publicly against the wave of repression and in support of the right to peaceful freedom of expression following the 11 July protests. Religious groups issued public statements condemning the government's use of violence against peaceful protestors and calling on the authorities to listen to the demands of the protestors.

Restrictions to freedom of movement

47. Religious leaders tell CSW that in recent years the government has relaxed its enforcement of laws regulating change of residence. According to Ministry of Housing officials, the laws were originally put in place to prohibit the movement of Cubans from rural areas to the cities, where there are often more opportunities in terms of housing and employment. In the past there have been cases of religious leaders and their families prevented from registering their new place of residence when transferred to a new church. This inability to re-register has implications for almost every aspect of life including the receipt of government rations, participation in elections, and applications for travel and exit visas.
48. That said, the Cuban government has continued to threaten and impose travel restrictions on targeted individuals, including on those attempting to travel abroad, those attempting to enter Cuba, and those attempting to travel freely within the country. At different points since 2018 a number of religious leaders were declared 'regulado' (i.e. regulated), effectively subjecting them to an indefinite and arbitrary international travel ban. Many HRDs and independent journalists reporting on FoRB issues were also barred from leaving the island.
49. For example, on 31 October 2022, Abu Duyanah who leads the Cuban Association for the Dissemination of Islam, was preparing to board a flight to make pilgrimage to Mecca. Before boarding, an officer from the Directorate of Identification, Immigration, and Foreigners (DIEE) notified him that he was under a travel ban and would not be allowed to board his flight. When Abu Duyanah asked why, the officer informed him that he is a person of 'public interest' and a threat to national security.
50. In an example of the second type of travel restriction, the leader of a large independent Protestant ministry in Las Tunas, who has been a frequently targeted by the government because of his leadership of an unregistered religious group and support to families of political prisoners, was warned by State Security officers that his daughters who are in exile would not be permitted to re-enter Cuba to visit him and his wife.
51. The pastor of a registered church which belongs to the CCC was stopped by State Security while returning home from the eastern part of Cuba where they were collecting donations from local churches to give to those affected by the August 2022 fuel tank explosions in Matanzas. State Security officers told the pastor that they were not authorised to collect humanitarian aid of any kind in the eastern regions and that the donations would be confiscated. The officers imposed a ban on the pastor's religious activities in four eastern provinces and ordered the pastor to return to their home city within six hours.

Forced Exile

52. While it is impossible to know how many Cubans have left the island under threat, many religious leaders and FoRB defenders have been forced to leave the country following ultimatums by State Security.
53. In one example, in July 2022, Ricardo Fernández Izaguirre was summoned to the DIEE. A State Security officer met him, demanded his identity documents, and informed him that he was under arrest, before taking him to the police station. There, a woman who identified herself as a State Security major confirmed to Mr Fernández Izaguirre that the passports for his children and mother-in-law had been issued and showed him photos. She informed him that the travel documents would not be released unless he signed a document renouncing his Cuban citizenship, rendering him stateless. After he signed the document, the major spent three hours detailing the extent of the 'damage' that Mr Fernández Izaguirre has caused the Revolution by documenting FoRB violations and sharing them with the international community over the past three years. A few days later, the passports for his family members were released. Mr Fernández Izaguirre and his family left Cuba and received asylum abroad.
54. In some cases, Cubans who had been under a travel ban, some for years, were informed that the ban would be lifted to allow them to travel as long as they did not return. Independent journalist and FoRB defender Yoel Suarez and prominent Apostolic Movement leader Alain

Toledano Valiente both went into forced exile with their families in 2022 after being informed by State Security that they would be permitted to travel outside of Cuba only on the condition that they did not come back.

Recommendations to the government of Cuba:

55. Amend the constitution and civil, administrative and criminal codes in line with international law and norms, including Article 18 of the ICCPR, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the San José Pact;
56. Ratify the ICCPR and ICECSR and ensure that authorities on every level, including CCP officials, implement its provisions nationally, regionally and locally;
57. Issue a standing invitation to UN Special Procedures, including inviting the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, as well as other thematic UN rapporteurs, to visit Cuba with unhindered access to all parts of the country;
58. Eliminate the Office for Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the CCP as it currently exists, or reform it to operate transparently within defined legal parameters and with recourse for appeal;
59. Eliminate the requirement for religious groups to register, or bring registration procedures and requirements into line with international best practice for non-discriminatory registration;
60. Ensure equal, transparent and non-discriminatory access to permits for renovations and building projects, religious visas, and vehicle licences; and ensure legacies are handled fairly, protecting the right of individuals to leave their property to the church or denomination of their choice;
61. Allow religious associations, institutions, seminaries and umbrella groups or networks to operate autonomously without pressure or interference from government or CCP official and allow them to independently engage in social and humanitarian work;
62. Guarantee freedom for religious leaders and HRDs to carry out their work without harassment, threats and imprisonment or other government pressure targeting them or their families;
63. Safeguard the freedom of all Cubans to assemble and worship according to their professed religion or belief, and to hold peaceful public events free from interference and intimidation;
64. Lift existing travel bans immediately and without condition, and cease the practice of restricting the movements of religious leaders and those who work on human rights and FoRB issues.
65. Guarantee protection from discrimination on the basis of one's religion in the workplace, educational institutions and all other social and political spheres;
66. Guarantee all prisoners, whether criminal or political, their basic human rights including FoRB as defined in the Nelson Mandela Rules.

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