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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 January 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting That Cuba Take Immediate Action To Guarantee The Right To Freedom Of Religion For All Its Citizens

1. Introduction

Despite Christians accounting for approximately 60% of the population in Cuba,(1) it is ranked by Open Doors as the 24th worst country for Christians.(2) In Cuba, the government heavily suppresses dissent and requires that Christians align with the government's Communist agenda.(3) Christians who speak out against the injustices of the government risk being harassed, interrogated, and imprisoned.(4) The government also requires churches to register with the Office of Religious Affairs, and unregistered churches are at a greater risk of being persecuted.(5)

2. Background

Cuba has been under communist rule since 1959 and has severely suppressed religious freedom. One way the government suppresses religion is through the Office of Religious Affairs, which is responsible for registering churches and overseeing all religious activity in the country.(6) Registration is highly restrictive, and the majority of registered churches date back to before 1959.(7) New churches are often denied registration and are therefore considered illegal, and can be subjected to fines and closures.(8) However, just because a church is registered does not make it immune from being targeted. Registered churches still must seek approval to carry out activities beyond worship.(9) Religious leaders belonging to both registered and unregistered churches have been harassed, surveilled, and punished.(10)

The human rights situation in Cuba has further deteriorated following the government's extreme response to the 2021 protests.(11) As a result of these protests, individuals who the government deemed dissidents were prohibited from attending religious services.(12) Further, the government also targeted Christians and religious leaders for offering humanitarian aid to protestors by harassing them, fining them, and confiscating much of the aid.(13) According to one report, "[t]he government appeared especially intent on targeting religious leaders and individuals who offered spiritual or material support to families of political prisoners."(14)

Additionally, in 2022, the government took steps to further restrict religious freedom. That year, the government officially criminalized religious expressions that oppose the ideology of the state.(15) This means that Christian leaders who speak out against the injustices being carried out by the government risk restrictions, fines, threats, arrests, and are subject to surveillance.(16)

3. VIOLATIONS

In August 2025, the Cuban Observatory of Human Rights reported that there were more than thirty-one violations of religious freedom in Cuba.(17) One of the incidents involved the interrogation of the wife of a Christian pastor who was exiled from Cuba.(18)

On July 9, 2025, Pastor Maikel Velázquez disappeared after delivering medication to his friend's granddaughter.(19) He was later found on July 10, 2025, and was visibly shaken after being interrogated and threatened.(20)

In July 2025, authorities implemented increased restrictions on religious activities leading up to the fourth anniversary of widespread protests that took place in July 2021.(21) Authorities told religious leaders that they were not allowed to have families of political prisoners present at religious events or hold any events on the anniversary of the protests.(22) Further, authorities placed limitations on the number of people churches could have for services.(23) One pastor shared that "services that attract more than 50 or 100 people must be canceled."(24)

On May 19, 2025, authorities detained a Christian pastor and his wife for disobeying them for mentioning God during a military tribunal for their son.⁽²⁵⁾ If convicted, the couple will face up to eight years in prison.⁽²⁶⁾

On March 23, 2025, a Baptist pastor of a registered church in Havana was interrogated by police after he called for people to “Pray for Cuba” on social media.⁽²⁷⁾ Authorities alleged that he was “using the pulpit to claim that there were problems in Cuba that the Church can solve, when only the Revolution and its political systems can solve people’s problems.”⁽²⁸⁾ He was also warned that he and his family could face criminal charges if he continued to preach what they deemed to be ideological divisionism.⁽²⁹⁾

On February 18, 2025, authorities interrogated two Catholic leaders about their doctoral studies and their work with a Catholic-inspired center that promoted social, civic, and ethical issues in Cuba.⁽³⁰⁾

Christians who have been detained in Cuba are stripped of their right to religious freedom.⁽³¹⁾ Christians in prison have been denied access to a faith leader, religious texts, and from meeting with other prisoners belonging to the same faith.⁽³²⁾ According to one report, “freedom of religion or belief is not only systematically violated throughout Cuba’s prison system but is weaponised and used as a coercion and punishment tactic on prisoners.”⁽³³⁾

4. REQUEST

Cuba must take immediate action to protect the right of all its citizens to practice freedom of religion or belief. Cuba has a responsibility under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to ensure that all of its citizens have the right to “either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”⁽³⁴⁾ As shown by the examples of above, Cuba has failed to protect this fundamental human right. It is imperative that Cuba allow its citizens to freely practice their faith without fear of being spied on, harassed, or arrested.

(1) Cuba: Major World Religions (1900-2050)(World Religion Database, 2025), THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES, <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=63c>.

(2) Cuba, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/cuba/>.

(3) Id.

(4) Id.

(5) Id.

(6) OPEN DOORS, CUBA COUNTRY DOSSIER (2026), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Cuba-Country_Dossier-ODI-2026.pdf.

(7) Id.

(8) Id.

(9) Id.

(10) Anugrah Kumar, Cuban Gov’t Increasing Repression “In Almost Every Area”: Watchdog Report, THE CHRISTIAN POST (June 5, 2025).

(11) Ken Camp, Cuba Continues Crackdown on Freedom of Religion, BAPTIST STANDARD (June 3, 2025).

(12) Id.

(13) Id.

(14) Id.

(15) OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 5.

(16) Id.

- (17) OCDH Recorded 31 Violations of Religious Freedom in August, ADN CUBA (Sep. 24, 2025).
- (18) Id.
- (19) Pastors Increasingly Targeted, Harassed in Cuba, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (July 29, 2025).
- (20) Id.
- (21) Increased Restrictions on Churches in Run Up to Anniversary of Protests, CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE (July 3, 2025).
- (22) Id.
- (23) Id.
- (24) Id.
- (25) Edward Ross, Growing Oppression Continues in Cuba as Pastors Charged for Mentioning God, CHRISTIAN DAILY INTERNATIONAL (May 30, 2025).
- (26) Id.
- (27) Diana Chandler, Cuba's Crackdown on Christians and Other Religious Minorities Widens, ROYS REPORT (Jun. 9, 2025).
- (28) Id.
- (29) Id.
- (30) OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 5.
- (31) Rebecca Paveley, Cuba is Systematically Breaching Freedom of Religion, New Report Says, CHURCH TIMES (Jan. 21, 2026).
- (32) Id.
- (33) Id.
- (34) G.A. Res 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 18, (Dec. 10, 1948), <http://media.aclj.org/pdf/ECLJ-UPR-45-Saudi-Arabia-July-2023.pdf>.