



November 1, 2022

Dear President Miguel Díaz-Canel,

As individuals and organizations dedicated to protecting and promoting the universal right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief (FoRB) for all persons, we write to urge your Government to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit Cuba. We believe that a fact-finding visit by the UN representative would facilitate transparent and systematic follow-up on relevant recommendations offered by UN Human Rights Council members ahead of Cuba's May 2023 review and following your country's recent referendum for a new Constitution.

Cuba has facilitated [visits for two](#) UN Special Procedure mandate holders in recent years. But we believe that national and international stakeholders would greatly benefit from the work of additional independent mechanisms that can explore gaps in the implementation of universally accepted human rights norms and standards for FoRB. This includes laws, policies, and institutional practices that may undermine Cuba's ability to respect, protect, promote, and fulfill the right to FoRB in line with its international human rights obligations.

A country visit would also allow the Rapporteur to explore concerns about FoRB violations that have been expressed by independent monitors and experts and would compel the mandate-holder to engage substantively with the Government's views. This includes concerns raised by several special procedure mandate-holders about allegations of FoRB violations that have taken place within the past two years. In 2020, for example, special procedure mandate-holders requested information about the treatment of Alain Toledano, a leader of Cuba's Apostolic Movement, and his church. And earlier this year, numerous mandate holders intervened in the case of Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, a Protestant pastor imprisoned during the civic protests of July 11, 2021.

Civil society actors have also drawn the attention of these mechanisms to the cases of other religious leaders who were reportedly mistreated and arbitrarily detained in the July protests. This includes the cases of Castor José Álvarez Devesa, a Catholic priest in Camagüey who was reportedly mistreated during his arbitrary detention; as well as Yéremi Blanco Ramírez and Yarian Sierra in Matanzas, two pastors who were detained and held in poor conditions for almost two weeks and then placed on house arrest following their peaceful participation in a public demonstration.

Further to this, the Peru-based Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE) has documented and reported on the discriminatory processes being carried out by the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA). Civil Rights Defenders in Stockholm found in 2016 that it is “impossible for Cubans to fully enjoy the right to freedom of thought and conscience” and that “officially unrecognized” religious groups face repression. In 2019 the UK-based religious freedom advocacy organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that two Jewish boys in Camagüey province were banned from wearing their kippah in school, resulting in the disruption of their education. The Free Yoruba Association of Cuba has reported detentions, restrictions on its ability to gather, and threats of criminal sanctions reportedly because of its refusal to register with the ORA; and the Cuban Association for the Diffusion of Islam reported harassment against members.

As with other visits carried out by the mandate holder in recent years, a country visit can serve as a constructive platform from which all stakeholders [express](#) their concerns, exchange views, and explore practical ways forward. The Cuban Government should welcome a fact-finding visit by UN Special Rapporteur Dr. Nazila Ghanea as a way to strengthen the right to freedom of religion or belief for all in the country.

Sincerely,

Parliamentarians

Lydia Lamisi Akanvariba
Current parliamentarian, Ghana

Fiona Bruce
Current parliamentarian, United Kingdom

Abdoulie Ceesay
Current parliamentarian, The Gambia

Benedicto Adwell Chambo Kalua
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Halima Daud
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Cherylyn Dudley
Former parliamentarian, South Africa

Joelle Fiss
Current parliamentarian, Switzerland

Vladimir Gjorchev
Current parliamentarian, Macedonia

Zuwera Mohammed Ibrahimah
Current parliamentarian, Ghana

Esther Jailosi Jolobala
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Misolo Mussa Kapichila
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Billy Kaunda
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Dr. Ephraim Abel Kayembe
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Ireen Mambala
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Ismail Rizzq Mkumba
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Mantsiuoa Mosothoane
Current parliamentarian, Lesotho

Victor Musowa
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Jephter Mwale
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Grant Ndecha
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Kasit Piromya
Former parliamentarian, Thailand

Nedson Poya
Current parliamentarian, Malawi

Abid Raja
Current parliamentarian, Norway

Antonio de San Benevides
Current parliamentarian, Timor Leste

Jamshed Thomas
Current parliamentarian, Pakistan

Civil Society Organizations

CSW

Outreach Aid to the Americas

International Christian Concern

International Institute for Religious Freedom

Observatory for Religious Freedom in Latin America

Prisoners Defenders

Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation