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CUBA Apostolic coalition calls on government to respect religious freedom

Religious leaders representing the Apostolic Coalition in Cuba have published a declaration calling on the Cuban government to respect religious freedom. The declaration was signed by six leaders of the Christian group on October 14 as a reaction to systematic government persecution of members of the religious network.

The leaders told CSW that they had taken the bold and potentially risky step because, "...the ministers and disciples of our congregations are being accused and persecuted, they throw them out of their work, evict them from their houses which are fundamentally necessary for the pastors, destroy local meeting places, confiscate their goods and tools which are used in religious celebrations, [send us] warning letters, [subject us to] arbitrary detention, threats..."

While the leaders make it clear that they are not members of the political opposition, the declaration spells out a list of grievances against the Cuban government and calls on the authorities to respect their rights, as protected by the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Cuban Constitution. It also calls on the Cuban government to establish legislation on assembly and worship in order to put in place a framework to protect the rights of religious believers.

Pastor Omar Gude Perez, one of the main leaders of the Apostolic Coalition, was unable to put his name to the declaration as he is currently serving a six-year and eight-month prison sentence on trumped up charges. Leaders told CSW however, that they took the decision to write and publish this declaration because of his ongoing imprisonment and harassment and threats against other church leaders.

CSW-UK's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "This declaration is a call to action and the international community must respond by putting pressure on the Cuban government to respect religious freedom. These church leaders, who have put themselves in danger simply by putting their names to this declaration, are taking an enormous risk in the name of religious liberty. CSW adds its voice to theirs in calling on the government to cease its harassment of members of the Apostolic Movement and to establish a legal framework that will allow them to register their churches and enshrine freedom of assembly and worship in law."

Notes to Editors:

1. The full text of the declaration in Spanish and in English is available from the press office.
2. The Apostolic Coalition represents religious groups associated with the Apostolic Movement. The movement is a non-denominational, Charismatic, Protestant network of church groups which are outside of the traditionally recognized Christian denominations in Cuba. CSW has documented intense government persecution of church leaders linked to the network over the past three years. More information is available in our annual report on religious freedom in Cuba, available in Spanish and in English at <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=128>