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CUBA Pastor issues public appeal after permission to leave country for asylum in US is denied

A Cuban pastor and his family are issuing a public appeal to the government to allow them to leave Cuba. Pastor Omar Gude Perez, his wife and two children were granted asylum in the United States in July but have been refused permission to exit the island.

After receiving asylum in the US in July, the couple was informed by government official that they would not be issued exit visas, or “white cards”, as they are called in Cuba. Following negative press coverage, officials told the family they would in fact be allowed to leave, but three months on they say they have yet to see any indication that they will be permitted to go into exile. The family told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that they are concerned about the long delays and contradictory messages.

Pastor Gude, a national leader in a fast growing network of independent churches called the Apostolic Movement, served almost three years of a six and a half year prison sentence on trumped up charges. He was released on conditional liberty earlier this year but is prohibited from preaching or from travelling outside the city of Camaguey.

Pressure on other pastors in Cuba is also increasing. Another couple, both pastors from the same religious network in Camaguey as the Gude family, have been repeatedly cited by government officials and threatened with imprisonment and forcible closure of their church. On the most recent occasion, Benito Rodríguez and Bárbara Guzmán were ordered to appear at the local Ministry of Justice on October 11 and fined 200 Cuban pesos (approximately one month’s salary in Cuba).

Last month a Baptist pastor in the province of Santa Clara, Mario Felix Leonart Barroso, was put under house arrest on multiple occasions. Officials warned the family that they could be a target of an “act of repudiation”, government orchestrated mobs often mobilized by officials to intimidate and attack human rights and democracy activists.

CSW’s Special Ambassador Stuart Windsor said, “We are deeply concerned at the news that Cuban officials have once again declined to issue the Gude family an exit visa. News of increased pressure and threats against other church leaders is also extremely worrying. CSW calls on Cuba once again, to uphold its commitments as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to cease harassment of religious leaders. We hope that the government will also honor its promise to the Gude family to allow them to leave the country and begin a new life in the United States without any further delay.”

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of Pastor Perez’s appeal, in both Spanish and English, is available from the Press Office.
2. The Apostolic 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.