



3.13.2012

CUBA | CSW calls for investigation into attack that left Pentecostal Pastor with brain damage

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for an investigation into the violent attack on Pastor Reutilio Columbie of Shalom Christian Centre on 6 February, in which he suffered brain damage.

It is believed that the assault was the result of the pastor's decision to challenge the arbitrary confiscation of a church vehicle by the authorities. Pastor Columbie bought a truck from a local person five years ago and modified it to transport members of the Pentecostal church in Moa, Cuba. In December 2011 it was confiscated by the authorities without warning or explanation and apparently returned to the original owner, who has family ties to an individual in the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. The Central Committee is the same entity which holds authority over all religious matters, including registration of church property and vehicles, through the Office of Religious Affairs.

When the pastor protested the confiscation of the church vehicle and began the process of lodging a formal complaint to prove ownership, the family began to receive anonymous phone calls telling them to stop or he would pay the consequences. On 6 February Pastor Reutilio left his house at 2 am with the intention of travelling to the capital of Holguin Province in order to file the complaint, but was found unconscious on the street a few hours later and taken to the hospital. He cannot remember anything about the attack, but the only thing missing from his possession were the papers related to the vehicle. The pastor suffered severe inflammation of the brain as a result of the attack.

Pastor Reutilio, 41, is now recuperating at home with his wife Maida Perez and their three children, but still struggles with speech and memory. His daughter says that he is also frequently nauseous and dizzy. The family was promised an investigation into the attack, which never materialized, and now they have been told that too much time has elapsed for any investigation to be pursued.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW calls on the authorities to conduct a full investigation into the violent assault on Pastor Reutilio. The theft of documentation relating to the ownership of the church vehicle raises questions about the motives behind the violent assault on the pastor. Cuba lacks legislation to protect religious freedom and guarantee church property. This, combined with the fact that all religious matters are dealt with by the Office for Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), rather than regular judicial channels, leaves religious groups and leaders vulnerable to abuse and with no means to appeal decisions. CSW continues to call for the establishment of a legal framework, independent of the CCP, to regulate religious affairs."

Notes to Editors:

1. Shalom Christian Centre is a registered Pentecostal church with approximately 80 church members.
2. CSW's latest report on religious freedom in Cuba is [available here](#).