



(L to R: Esteban Sandez Suarez, Caridad Caballero, Marta Diaz Rondon, Erik Sandez Suarez. Courtesy: Pedazos de la Isla)

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CUBA | Catholic dissident held in solitary confinement, barred from religious activities

Caridad Caballero, a member of the Ladies in White, was arrested and imprisoned over the weekend along with her husband and teenage son, in order to prevent the family from attending Sunday morning church services for the fourteenth week in a row.

The family was detained by police on the morning of Friday, March 16 in Holguin city, as they visited a local hospital to pick up results of a medical exam. They were held in a local detention centre until Monday, March 19, when they were released at 9:40am.

News of their imprisonment came alongside reports that scores of other women across the island, the majority linked to the Ladies in White peaceful dissident group, were similarly prevented from attending Sunday morning mass. Roadblocks were reportedly set up in some cities to prevent members of human rights or pro-democracy groups from accessing churches.

Caballero was initially put into solitary confinement in a bug-infested cell with no light and only a hole in the ground for sewage. She was later moved to another isolation cell, where the lights were kept on at full strength 24 hours a day. Her husband and son were put into separate cells together with common prisoners. Both suffered physical mistreatment. Her husband, Esteban Sandez, was thrown twice against cement bunk beds and suffered severe bruising, while their 19 year-old son Erik, who suffers from asthma and diabetes, lost consciousness after being beaten by his fellow prisoners. Erik was taken to the hospital clinic, where he was treated before being returned to the cell.

Caridad Caballero has been prevented by Cuban security agents from participating in any religious activity since end of 2011, and she and her family have been prevented from attending Sunday morning mass at the Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church in the Pueblo Nuevo neighborhood of Holguin. Government security agents have also stopped them from attending classes and bible studies necessary for their Catholic Confirmation. Their church continues to offer the family moral and spiritual support, despite being targeted in an “act of repudiation” orchestrated by the military on January 22.

Caridad Caballero told Christian Solidarity Worldwide that she and her family are grateful for messages of support they have received from inside Cuba and around the world. She also noted attention in the international press to “...the situation, the repression against those of us who are trying to practice our faith. The government tries to impede us but we must continue down this path, the path of freedom. Christ came to give freedom to all. Just because we hold different beliefs to those who govern our country, they try to block us, to stop us from worshipping at our church. We hold fast to our faith and we will continue to fight. We may not succeed but we will continue to try to attend church like good Christians.”

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “We are deeply concerned at the increasingly heavy handed tactics the government is using to prevent Caridad Caballero, her family and many others like them from simply attending religious services on a Sunday morning. The upcoming visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Cuba should have been an opportunity for the government to demonstrate its commitment to improving the religious freedom

situation on the island. Instead we are seeing the opposite take place. Once again, we urge the Cuban government to allow all Cubans, regardless of their political beliefs, to participate in religious services and join together with others of their faith, free from harassment.”

Notes to Editors:

1. An “act of repudiation” is an orchestrated and often violent demonstration, designed to appear spontaneous, which aims to condemn and isolate the victim from the rest of the community.