



5.1.2012

CUBA | Pastor Gude Perez refused exit visa as family faces indefinite separation

The Cuban government continues to refuse to issue an exit visa to protestant Pastor Omar Gude Perez, nine months after his family was first offered asylum by the United States (US). The rest of the family, who have already been issued visas and are waiting on Pastor Gude Perez to be granted his, have been advised that the offer of asylum will expire if they do not leave the country in the next few weeks.

After the family of four was granted asylum in July 2011, they were informed by Cuban emigration officials that they would not be allowed to leave the country. Over the next few months, and following an international campaign, Pastor Gude Perez's wife Kenia was granted an exit visa along with their adolescent daughter. Further campaigning resulted in an exit visa being granted to their teenage son in late 2011, but the government remains adamant that they will not allow Pastor Gude Perez to leave the island.

Pastor Gude Perez, the leader of an unregistered and fast-growing network of protestant churches, was imprisoned on trumped up charges in 2008. He was released on "conditional liberty" after serving almost three years of six and a half year sentence. He and his wife have consistently and publicly denounced violations of religious freedom committed against their churches. They believe that their outspokenness on religious freedom issues is why the government is reluctant to allow Pastor Gude Perez to go to the US, where the couple would be able to speak more freely about the persecution they have suffered.

The family has expressed deep unhappiness regarding the decision they are facing. While his wife and two children are free to leave the country, they are reluctant to enter into an indefinite separation from Pastor Gude Perez. There is additional concern that the government may threaten or punish him if his wife speaks out publicly about the human rights violations the family has suffered. At the same time, while in Cuba, the couple is barred from religious work and the educational opportunities for their children have been severely limited. They continue to call on the Cuban government to issue Pastor Gude Perez an exit visa so that the family can leave Cuba together.

CSW Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW is deeply concerned at the way the Cuban government is treating the Gude Perez family. It is unconscionable to push this family into an enforced and indefinite separation, while at the same time severely restricting their ability to work and practice their faith, and, even worse, limiting their children's educational opportunities, while they are inside Cuba. We strongly urge the Cuban government to issue Pastor Gude Perez an exit visa as rapidly as possible to allow the family to remain together."

Notes to Editors:

1. Cubans are prohibited from travelling freely and must apply for and receive an exit visa, commonly referred to as a white card, in order to leave the country.
2. Pastor Omar Gude Perez is a leader of the Apostolic Movement, a network of churches independent of any registered religious institution. The network has grown rapidly in recent years and has been disproportionately targeted by the government. A number of its national and local leaders have been

imprisoned and churches have been threatened with closure. At least one church has been destroyed by government order.

3. Please include the following linked text in any online articles using the above information... Find out more about [religious freedom in Cuba](#) from Christian Solidarity Worldwide.