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## CUBA Catholic activist Caridad Caballero goes into exile

Cuban human rights defender and independent journalist, Caridad Caballero, arrived in Miami yesterday following the sudden announcement earlier this week that she and her family were going into exile.

Caballero, a member of the Ladies in White, the Sakharov Prize-winning non-violent protest group, was consistently targeted by Cuban state security because of her work as an independent journalist. The authorities particularly targeted her religious faith, blocking her from participating in any religious activities at the Jesus Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church in the Pueblo Nuevo neighborhood of Holguin.

Each week since the beginning of the year, Caballero's home was surrounded by state security agents. She was frequently detained in prison, along with her husband and son, for the duration of Sunday morning mass. In addition, she was barred from attending weekly Bible studies or confirmation classes. Her baptism and confirmation into the Catholic Church on Easter Sunday had to be postponed when once again she was thrown into prison.

Caballero was among hundreds of Catholic dissidents who were imprisoned for the duration of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in March. Her unexpected departure comes at the same time as the Cuban government continues to deny Protestant pastor Omar Gude Perez permission to leave the country, despite an offer of asylum in the US made last year.

The experiences of Caballero and Gude Perez are part of a sharp increase in religious freedom violations in Cuba this year. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has recorded more than 60 such violations, some involving large groups of people, in the first half of the year.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas, CEO said, "We are pleased that Caridad and her family will now be able to practice their faith in freedom in the United States. However, it is important to keep in mind the circumstances which led to their exile. It is imperative that the international community holds Cuba to account and insists that religious freedom and other basic human rights be upheld. In addition, we continue to urge to the Cuban government to issue Pastor Gude Perez an exit visa as soon as possible."