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CUBA CSW calls for release of human rights defender Jose Daniel Ferrer

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for the immediate release of Jose Daniel Ferrer, a prominent Cuban human rights defender involved in documenting violations of religious freedom, whose whereabouts are unknown following his arrest in Holguin on July 30.

The arrest of 41 year-old Ferrer, who is the leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba and a devout Catholic, comes as individual cases of religious freedom violations documented by CSW in 2012 alone reached the hundred mark. This total does not include the hundreds of dissidents who were rounded up and detained across the island to prevent them from attending the activities surrounding the Pope's visit in March.

In recent months, Ferrer, who is based in eastern Cuba, has been actively documenting and denouncing cases of men and women who have been forcibly prevented by state security officials from participating in religious activities. He is a member of the group of 75 political prisoners arrested during the 2003 Black Spring Crackdown and was one of a small group who agreed to be released from prison on condition that he is allowed to stay in Cuba.

CSW has observed a sharp decline in religious freedom on the island since the beginning of the year. Catholic and protestant churches of all denominations have reported religious freedom violations, the majority related to the refusal of churches to bow to government demands to expel certain individuals from their congregations. The increased repression of churches has taken place as at the same time the government attempts to promote an image of respect for religious freedom abroad.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW is deeply concerned about the welfare of Jose Daniel Ferrer, whose courageous work in recent months has helped to expose the hypocrisy of the Cuban regime as it publicly claims to respect religious freedom but increasingly seeks to exert control over church affairs. Ferrer's arbitrary detention illustrates how far the government will go to silence those who threaten the image it is trying to promote. His only crime has been to demand that the government respect the fundamental rights of individual Cubans, including the exercise of their religious freedom and the freedom of the Church to open its doors to all Cubans without discrimination. We call on the Cuban government to release Ferrer immediately and to stop its policy of attempting to separate individual Cubans from their communities of faith."