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CUBA | Pastor Gude Perez issues open letter demanding freedom as wife raises family's plight in Washington DC

As Pastor Omar Gude Perez issues an [open letter](#) demanding that the Cuban government allow him to leave the country with his family, his wife Kenia is travelling to Washington DC this week to seek support for her family's plight.

Cuban authorities have refused to issue Omar Gude Perez, the leader of a large network of unregistered churches, permission to leave the island despite an offer of asylum for the family in the United States 15 months ago. In the meantime, the couple's two teenage children have been barred from attending school. Pastor Gude Perez is also prohibited from working as a pastor.

[In his letter](#), Pastor Gude Perez explains the impact the government's actions have had on his family, "Today our family suffers – we are unable to build a future and to fulfill the purposes that bring familial happiness because of the high number of restrictions placed upon us, including the fact that I cannot work as a pastor because I am not someone the system wishes to authorize, because it's not in its interests to do so."

The government's continued failure to allow the family to leave comes despite an official announcement that the authorities will no longer force Cubans to obtain a "white card" in order to leave the country from January 2013. However, the reform will not apply to certain professions and the government has reserved the right to prevent citizens from leaving for vague reasons of national security.

Pastor Gude Perez, a national leader of the Apostolic Movement, a fast growing network of independent churches was first imprisoned on trumped up charges in May 2008. A year later, he was sentenced to more than six years in prison. He was released on conditional liberty following an international campaign in early 2011.

Religious freedom has deteriorated dramatically in Cuba in 2012 with more than 100 documented cases of violations of religious freedom since January. Unregistered churches, like those affiliated with the Apostolic Movement, are particularly vulnerable. In October, Christian Solidarity Worldwide received reports that the government forcibly shut down a Mormon church in Central Havana. Church leaders complained that attempts to legally register the church had been denied.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston echoed Pastor Gude Perez' call for freedom: "It is unconscionable that even as they publicize a new policy that will eliminate the requirement for legal permission to leave the country, the Cuban government continues to block this family's ability to build a new life, prevent their children from receiving an education and will not allow them to freely exercise their religion. We are privileged to be able to facilitate his wife's visit to Washington and ask policy makers there to take this case very seriously."

Notes to Editors:

1. Pastor Gude Perez' open letter is available to download in [Spanish](#) and [English](#) translation.