



10.25.13

CUBA | Church Under Attack From Government

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) condemns attempts by Cuban State Security and Communist Party officials to forcibly confiscate a property which serves as the national headquarters of the Apostolic Movement, one of the largest protestant Christian networks on the island.

The property, which is also the home of one of the network's national leaders, is located in the central Cuban city of Camagüey. It was legally transferred by the former owner, Rev. Omar Gude Perez, to his nephew, Rev. Yiorvis Bravo Denis, before Rev. Gude Perez left the country earlier this year. In mid-September, Rev. Bravo Denis was summoned to appear at court, where he produced the documents, signed and notarized by a government lawyer, that prove his ownership of the property.

Since then, the family has been subjected to continued harassment, including 'acts of repudiation,' where violent and verbally abusive mobs organized by state security agents surround the property to intimidate the inhabitants.

In a show of solidarity, leaders and members of other churches from across the city and country have joined Rev. Bravo Denis and his family inside the property. The family believes this physical demonstration of support has protected them thus far.

Government officials have now begun a defamation campaign, targeting Reverends Bravo Denis and Gude Perez. This week the First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in Camagüey met with members of the state media, including radio, print and television journalists, to instruct them to publish defamatory pieces targeting both church leaders. The journalists were specifically told to "emphasize that Yiorvis and Omar are not pastors, but rather common criminals."

Family members of Rev. Bravo Denis say the situation remains tense. The property is surrounded by state security agents day and night. An independent journalist who attempted to interview the church members received verbal death threats from state security agents. "They now realize that in the eyes of the world, they've lost the legal battle to confiscate the

house...This has caused a huge scandal in the city of Camagüey, where nothing like this has ever really happened in the very heart of the city before,” said Kenia Denis, the wife of Rev. Gude Perez and aunt of Rev. Bravo Denis.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We urge the international community to condemn the Cuban government’s actions in targeting this family and church over the past month, as a matter of urgency. This campaign of harassment and intimidation, aimed at a group of people who have committed no crime, is unacceptable and reveals the true stance of the Cuban Communist Party when it comes to freedom of religion or belief. We call on the Cuban government to cease its targeting of Reverend Bravo Denis and the Apostolic Movement, and to facilitate a process whereby the network can operate legally. We commend the people of Cuba and of Camagüey in particular for their brave show of solidarity with Reverend Bravo Denis and his family during these attacks; we stand with them in spirit.”