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CUBA | Pastor Barred From Leaving Country

A Cuban pastor was barred by government officials from leaving the country last month despite having a valid passport and visa. Rev. Bernardo de Quesada Salomón attempted to travel on Nov. 27 to attend a religious conference in the Dominican Republic when he was informed by Cuban immigration officials at Havana airport he had been categorized as “Limited” and would not be permitted to board the plane.

The Cuban government eliminated the need for Cubans to obtain an exit visa in order to travel abroad at the beginning of 2013, but for reasons of national security, reserved the right to prevent some Cubans from travelling.

Rev de Quesada Salomón, who travelled to the United States and to Brazil to attend religious events earlier this year, was not given any explanation for the change in his status and was told to contact the National Office for Attention to the Population (NOAP) for more details. When he did so, the NOAP suggested he submit a written request for information to the National Director for Immigration. He has not received a response.

Rev. de Quesada Salomón is a national leader of the Apostolic Movement, a large but unregistered network of protestant churches in Cuba. Despite repeated attempts to register the group, the government has refused to allow them to do so and has aggressively targeted churches associated with the network with fines and threats of confiscation of property. Another Apostolic Movement leader, Rev. Mario ‘Mayím’ Travieso Medina, was also denied the right to travel in January. As in the case of Rev. de Quesada Salomón, Rev. Travieso was told he was in the “limited” category and was given no other explanation.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We were disappointed to learn of the Cuban government’s return to limiting its citizens’ right to travel. Rev. de Quesada Salomón’s participation in a Christian conference in the Dominican Republic cannot seriously be considered a threat to national security, and CSW is concerned that this may open the door to the Cuban government arbitrarily banning other religious leaders from travelling out of the country. We urge the Cuban government to restore Rev. de Quesada Salomón’s ability to travel and to fully implement this reform by allowing its citizens to travel without hindrance.”