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CUBA | Rev. Leonart Barroso Temporarily Detained, Computer Confiscated

Religious freedom activists Rev. Mario Felix Leonart Barroso and his wife Yoaxis Marcheco Suarez were temporarily detained by Cuban police in the municipality of Camajuaní on June 22 and released two hours later without charge. Their laptop computers and a memory flash drive were confiscated.

The police told the couple the computers and memory stick were needed for further investigation into possible criminal activities.

Marcheco told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) the majority of the music used in their church services is saved on one of the laptops. There are concerns that state security officials could plant information on the couple's computers in order to justify criminal charges.

Rev. Leonart was arrested and interrogated in the past but has never been charged with any crime. Earlier this year, despite pressure by state security agents to force him to do so, he refused to sign an "Advertencia Oficial" or Official Warning, which is often used in Cuba as evidence in future arrests. However, in that incident, the state security agents took DNA and scent samples from him.

Rev. Leonart leads the Ebenezer Baptist Church in the village of Taguayabon in the Camajuani municipality, located in the central province of Villa Clara. He also helped to establish the Patmos Institute, an independent inter-denominational forum to promote Christian intellectual thought, based in Villa Clara.

Prior to the June 22 detention, Rev. Leonart and another Patmos Institute leader, Father Felix Ben Castilla of the Vetero-Catholic Church, were detained June 6 along with Cuban singer David Omni as they traveled between locations during an interdenominational series of concerts celebrating Pentecost. When Rev. Leonart queried the reason for the arrest, a state security agent told him it was "for being a bad father." They were released without charge, although Father Ben Castilla was temporarily detained again June 11.

Rev. Leonart maintains the blog *Cubano Confesante*, where he regularly denounces violations of religious freedom in Cuba. He and his wife travelled to Washington DC last year to brief US policy makers and raise awareness of ongoing and widespread violations of religious freedom in Cuba.

CSW has registered more than 130 serious documented violations of religious freedom in Cuba, with many involving large groups of people, since Jan. 1. Many of those included were

documented by Rev. Leonart and his wife. This follows a trend of a crackdown on religious freedom in recent years; 185 violations were recorded in 2013, up from 120 in 2012.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We call on the Cuban government to return the laptops and flash drives confiscated from Mario Felix and Yoaxis. CSW is appalled by these all too frequent arbitrary temporary detentions of church leaders and other citizens, and we are deeply concerned by the continued increase in documented violations of religious freedom. We urge the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union to continue to insist on the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all in Cuba. This includes ensuring that religious organizations and groups can function independently of government interference and free of harassment."