



CUBA: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

AUGUST 2014

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**“THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH ARE OPEN
TO ALL REGARDLESS OF THEIR POLITICAL
BELIEFS. JUST AS MEMBERS OF THE
COMMUNIST PARTY ARE WELCOME, SO ARE
THOSE OF OTHER POLITICAL BELIEFS.**

**“JESUS CHRIST DID NOT DISCRIMINATE
AND NEITHER WILL I.”**

Denominational leader expressing frustration at government
interference in churches. See p.9

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CSW is a Christian organisation working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite government claims of increased respect for religious freedom, reported violations of religious freedom in Cuba continued to increase dramatically over the 19 months covered by this report. From the beginning of 2014 to mid-July, CSW recorded 170 separate religious freedom violations, many of which involved dozens of victims. This followed the record of 180 documented cases in 2013, compared with 120 in 2012 and 40 in 2011. Religious groups across the spectrum all reported varying degrees of hostility from the government. Only a few reported any notable improvement.

Government agents continued to employ more brutal and public tactics than witnessed in the first decade of the millennium. CSW continued to receive regular reports of severe and sustained harassment and sporadic reports of violent beatings of Protestant pastors and lay workers in different parts of the country. Week after week, scores of women were physically and violently dragged away from Sunday morning services by state security agents. Most were arbitrarily detained until after the conclusion of religious services. There were also increased reports of threats of forced closure, confiscation and demolition of church buildings, including historic, registered churches; some of these threats were carried out. The government continued to employ a strategy of frequent, temporary arbitrary detention to target those it views as political dissidents. This tactic is also applied to religious leaders who are viewed as problematic, for whatever reason, by the authorities. A significant number reported being temporarily detained and imprisoned multiple times over the course of the past year.

Religious leaders continued to put much of the blame for ongoing abuses of religious freedom on the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), an arm of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Religious leaders unanimously object to the Communist Party being given direct authority over all religious activities and business, rather than officially bringing these issues under government oversight when such oversight is needed. The consistently antagonistic relationship between the director of the ORA, Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello, and the leadership of many religious groups is evidence that the office exists solely to monitor, hinder and restrict the activities of religious groups. Over the past year the ORA has denied authorisation for a number of religious activities and has, in cooperation with other government agencies, issued fines and threats of confiscation of church and private property to dozens of churches and religious organisations. The ORA apparently also gave the green light to the July 2014 demolition of a large church and pastoral home in Santiago de Cuba.

Cuba signed both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in early 2008. Five years later Cuba has yet to make any move to ratify either. According to church leaders representing the full spectrum of denominations in Cuba, the reforms that have taken place have been mostly cosmetic, in reality privileges granted to a few religious groups with the aim of improving Cuba's image in the outside world. All of this indicates that rather than moving towards a more open society, the government under the leadership of Raul Castro still views religious organisations, and in particular their leaders, as potentially dangerous entities to be controlled as much as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Cuban government:

- To respect and uphold Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN, and to ratify and implement fully all provisions of the ICCPR and the ICECSR;
- To ensure that local authorities, including Cuban Communist Party (CCP) leaders, are aware of the provisions included in the ICCPR and the ICECSR, and that they are implemented at the local level;
- To allow human rights rapporteurs from international organisations and representatives of non-governmental organisations to visit the country in order to examine and report on human rights;
- To safeguard the freedom of all Cubans to assemble and worship according to their professed religion;
- To allow all religious groups to operate freely without pressure or interference from government or CCP officials;
- To remove official responsibility for religious groups and associations from the Office of Religious Affairs of the CCP;
- To loosen state controls and to streamline procedures concerning the registration of churches, the accreditation of seminaries and the building and renovation of church buildings;
- To withdraw Directive 43 and Resolution 46 which impose severe restrictions on all house churches, to legalise and provide legal protection for all house churches in Cuba, and to re-open those churches which have been closed under the legislation;
- To guarantee freedom for Cuban religious leaders to carry out their ministry, within and outside the church walls, without harassment, threats or government pressure;
- To end discrimination in regard to government licences including permission for renovations and building projects, travel abroad, the right to invite foreign visitors on a religious visa, vehicle licences, and to legacies and the right of individuals to leave their property to the church or denomination of their choice;
- To guarantee protection from discrimination on the basis of one's religion in the workplace, school and all other social and political spheres;
- To bring an end to government support of any religious group over other religious groups, and to ensure equal access for all groups to the media, including the right to freely publish their own media online, in print and in radio and video;

- To allow all religious groups to import or print their own religious materials and literature;
- To guarantee all prisoners, whether criminal or political, their fundamental human rights including religious rights;
- To allow all prisoners, regardless of the crime for which they have been imprisoned, the right to participate in religious services;
- To end the use of government informants in churches and seminaries;
- To immediately release Sonia Garro, her husband Ramón Alejandro Muñoz Gonzales and another activist, Eugenio Hernández Hernández from prison;
- To eliminate the new restriction of one bank account per religious association and restore the right of individual churches and other religious entities to operate their own independent bank accounts.

To the United States government:

- To establish specific criteria for the Cuban authorities to meet (e.g. ratification of the ICCPR and ICESCR) in order to measure progress more effectively in regard to human rights and democratic reform, as the United States (US) regularly reviews its policy toward Cuba;
- That the US Interest Section in Havana continue to closely monitor religious freedom in Cuba and make an effort to engage with religious leaders of all faiths and denominations, while taking into consideration the political sensitivities under which many religious leaders must work;
- To increase opportunities for religious exchanges and educational visits between the two countries, and facilitate when possible the transfer of aid and religious materials from religious groups in the US to their associate religious organisations in Cuba;
- To encourage, when possible, the Cuban government to grant invitations to UN thematic Special Rapporteurs such as those with mandates on religious freedom, torture and freedom of expression and opinion, taking into account the lack of any official political dialogue between the US and Cuban governments;
- To continue to seek ways of engaging with members of Cuban civil society, offering support when appropriate;
- To continue to establish and maintain contact with the families of political prisoners, and to raise its concerns regarding continued violation of the prisoners' rights, including denial of religious rights, with the Cuban authorities.

To the European Union and member states:

- To define 'measurable progress' by establishing specific criteria for the Cuban authorities to meet (e.g. ratification of the ICCPR and ICESCR), and to maintain the Common Position on Cuba until these criteria are met;
- To raise religious freedom regularly in all its dialogues with the Cuban authorities, including with the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, and encourage the Cuban government to implement the recommendations listed above;
- That EU representations in Havana, including the EU delegation to Cuba and the embassies of member states, maintain an open dialogue with religious leaders from all denominations and religious groups, while taking into consideration the political sensitivities under which many religious leaders must work;
- To encourage the Cuban government to grant invitations to UN thematic Special Rapporteurs such as those with mandates on religious freedom, torture and freedom of expression and opinion;

- To continue to seek ways of engaging with members of Cuban civil society, offering support when appropriate;
- To continue to establish and maintain contact with the families of political prisoners, and to raise its concerns regarding continued violation of the prisoners' rights, including denial of religious rights, with the Cuban authorities.

To the United Nations:

- To insist that Cuba ratify and fully implement the treaties to which it has signed up, including the ICCPR and ICESCR, as Cuba continues to play a role in the UN Human Rights Council. In addition, Cuba should be urged to extend invitations to the UN thematic Special Rapporteurs with mandates on religious freedom, human rights defenders, torture, independence of the judiciary, and arbitrary detention, to visit Cuba.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Cuban constitution sets out specific and basic guarantees regarding religious freedom. However, these freedoms are limited by the condition that the preservation of socialism and communism takes precedence over all other rights. Article 8 of the Cuban constitution states that "The State recognises, respects, and guarantees religious liberty," and Article 55 goes even further, saying:

The State, which recognises, respects, and guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, also recognises, respects, and guarantees the freedom of every citizen to change religious beliefs or not to have any, and to profess, within the confines of the law, the religious worship of his/her preference. The law regulates the relationship of the State with religious institutions.

This is in line with international standards on religious freedom. However, the rights guaranteed in Articles 8 and 55 are later qualified in Article 62, which states that "No recognised liberty may be exercised against the existence and aims of the socialist State and the nation's determination to build socialism and communism." This places the protection of the existence and aims, as well as the construction, of a socialist and communist state above fundamental human rights, including those related to religious freedom.

A clause in the Cuban penal code (Chapter IV, Article 206) further limits the rights laid out in Article 55 of the constitution. The clause, called 'Abuse of Liberty of Worship', allows for the imprisonment for anywhere from three months to one year of anyone who "having abused the freedom of creed guaranteed to all by the Constitution, places religious beliefs in conflict with the aims of education, the duties of labour, defending the nation in arms, the reverence of its symbols or any other stipulations whatsoever contained in the Constitution..." Human Rights Watch has noted that "[t]his provision, which is defined as a crime against public order, allows the state to penalize a broad range of religious activities that would not endanger public order."¹

In regard to international law, Cuba is not party to the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights which provides strong protections for freedom of religion and conscience. Cuba has signed but not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both of which also contain provisions to protect religious freedom.

Religious groups and associations, which must be registered in order to operate legally in Cuba, come under the authority of the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. This puts them in the unique position of having to submit

all requests for authorisation to a non-government entity without any recourse for appeal. The ORA, for its part, is focused almost entirely on controlling and restricting the public and private manifestation of religious faith, not on upholding and protecting the religious freedom of Cuban citizens.

The ORA, under the long-time direction of Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello, a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, at every level maintains a consistently antagonistic relationship with most religious groups. Its representatives at the provincial and municipal levels interface with local religious groups but all decisions and permits are approved by the main office in Havana. CSW regularly receives reports of hostility on the part of provincial and municipal religious affairs officers, directed at local religious organisations. The ORA does not operate within any official set of guidelines or legal framework, aside from those mentioned above, giving its officials sweeping power over religious groups and associations and individuals associated with those groups.

The office routinely refuses or fails to respond to the requests of church leaders to build additions to or make repairs to their church buildings. It also habitually fails to grant authorisation for large church activities, withholds registration permits from house churches affiliated with registered denominations, and in the past has regularly and arbitrarily denied church leaders the right to travel out of the country.² The ORA has also denied registration to large Protestant groups such as the Apostolic Movement. It has denied the right to register to groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Berean Baptists, which were stripped of registration in the 1970s, effectively forcing them to organise and worship outside the law. The antagonistic relationship between the ORA and religious organisations is not limited to those with a Christian identity. Lorenzo Hernández García, an adherent of a Yoruba religious society in central Cuba, told CSW that religious affairs officials consistently attempt to exercise total control over the activities of the group. He expressed that the members of the society are unhappy with this constant interference, protesting that the actions of the ORA and its officials prevent the society from freely exercising their faith and religious practices.

There is some internal debate within Cuban religious circles on whether or not legislation which lays out parameters for legal religious activity would be helpful or not. Most church leaders agree, however, that control over religious activities and associations should be

² The ORA much more frequently simply fails to respond to requests rather than refusing them outright. This happens on such a regular basis that it seems a clear strategy to restrict and discourage religious activity, particularly when linked to church growth, without leaving a paper trail that would show evidence of violations of religious freedom.

¹ Human Rights Watch. *Cuba's Repressive Machinery – Chapter III, Impediments to Human Rights in Cuban Law* <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/cuba/index.htm#TopOfPage>

removed from the ORA. Many have called for the government to establish legal channels with provision for appealing negative decisions, or to deal with issues related to religious buildings through already existing bodies like the Ministry of Public Planning. These would, ideally, allow for any issues pertaining to religious groups and associations to be dealt with through standard legal structures.

GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN AND DENIAL OF RIGHT TO WORSHIP

The majority of reported religious freedom violations documented by CSW in 2013 and in the first half of 2014 consisted of government agents preventing Cubans from exercising their right to worship. Each Sunday over the past three years CSW has received reports that scores of women, and sometimes men and children, were detained by government agents across the island and forcibly prevented from attending Sunday morning services. The total number of individual cases of this kind, over the 19 months covered by this report, numbers in the thousands. On one Sunday in July 2014, over 100 women were arbitrarily detained in order to prevent them from attending Sunday morning Mass.

In most of these cases the victims were Cubans considered by the government to be political dissidents. The majority of those affected were Roman Catholics and women affiliated with the Ladies in White movement.³ The government actively prevents them from participating in religious services by blocking the targeted individuals in their home (by surrounding the home with police, state security agents and government-organised mobs) or by detaining them without charge, sometimes violently, and imprisoning them for the duration of the religious services. While government officials appear to be primarily focused on Sunday morning activities, some victims reported that they were also banned from attending other weeknight events including Bible studies and prayer groups. This would suggest that the government policy is aimed not only at preventing the victims from being present at Sunday Mass, but is also an attempt to isolate them from their community of faith - an issue which is discussed in the next section of this report.

³ The Ladies in White is a dissident movement in Cuba comprising the wives and other female relatives of jailed dissidents. Each week the members dress in white, attend Mass and then, as a demonstration of support for political prisoners, walk silently holding gladioli in various cities. While in some cases government agents arrested the women after Mass in order to stop them from marching, in the majority of cases the women were picked up early in the morning to stop them from attending religious services. CSW did not register as religious freedom violations instances where women were detained after attending Mass.

In some cases, the aggressive behaviour of Cuban government agents towards members of the Ladies in White has had a larger negative impact on the leaders and other attendees at the church involved. In one case, on 28 July 2013 in Cárdenas, Matanzas at around 9am during Sunday morning Mass, La Purísima Concepción Catholic Church was surrounded by police and state security agents. According to Leticia Ramos Herrera, one of the members of the Ladies in White in attendance at the church, there were 19 police vehicles, two buses, two trucks full of state security agents in civilian clothes and two ambulances. Ms Ramos Herrera added that as well as the state agents, a mob of people holding sticks and rocks was also waiting outside the church.

The Bishop of Matanzas, Manuel Hilario de Cespedes, who had reportedly come to Cárdenas to hold Mass there that Sunday because of the violence against members of the Ladies in White during the previous two weeks, approached the mob and the officials. The bishop instructed parishioners, including members of the Ladies in White, to stay inside the church for their own safety. At around 1pm the secretary of the Communist Party arrived and an agreement was reached with the bishop that the members of the Ladies in White would be taken to their homes on the bus, but that the bishop would accompany them to ensure that each woman arrived safely in her home.

As mentioned above, the harassment and arbitrary detention was frequently accompanied by threats and severe violence. In another Sunday morning incident in Cárdenas in 2013, unrelated to the events of 28 July, a state security agent who goes by the nickname 'Chuly' told Ms Ramos Herrera, as she violently restrained her before detaining her, that she was going to kill her by "putting a bullet right through my forehead if I kept attending Mass and walking on Sundays." Unsurprisingly, the levels of violence used against members of the Ladies in White to stop them from attending religious services sometimes have tragic consequences. On 22 June 2014 Yelezni Aguilera Santo suffered a miscarriage at nine weeks, after being violently beaten while on her way to attend Sunday morning Mass.

It is important to note that three of the Cubans arrested in the crackdown on dissidents immediately preceding the March 2012 visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Cuba are still in prison. Sonia Garro, a member of the Ladies in White, her husband Ramón Alejandro Muñoz Gonzales and another activist, Eugenio Hernández Hernández were among the hundreds of devout Roman Catholics who were arrested, sometimes violently, and arbitrarily imprisoned during the week of the Pope's visit in order to prevent them from attending any of the scheduled Masses or other events. A 30 June 2014 trial of the three on trumped up charges of 'attempted murder' and 'public disorder' was indefinitely postponed. No reason was given.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND PRESSURE ON CHURCH LEADERS

The strategy of attempting to enforce the social isolation of those who fall foul of the authorities, especially by excluding and separating them from their communities of faith, has been utilised by the Cuban government since the earliest days of the Cuban Revolution. Church leaders of all Protestant denominations, and Roman Catholic priests, continue to report heavy pressure from government officials to expel and shun certain members of their congregations who are singled out by the authorities. Those targeted are usually those involved in independent journalism, running an independent library, or human rights or pro-democracy activism – or all of the above – all considered by the government to be counter-revolutionary activities. Violations associated with this issue continued to increase over the past 19 months partly due to this strategy evidently becoming a higher priority for the government, but also because more and more religious leaders and groups actively resisted government attempts to dictate who may or may not participate in religious activities. This in turn led to more frequent confrontations between the government and religious leaders and groups.

The increasing number of churches which resist government threats and allow targeted individuals or their families to participate in church activities report that they are under constant and intrusive government surveillance. Roman Catholic priest Father José Conrado Rodríguez Alegre, who has a long history of rebuffing government demands to expel dissidents from his congregation, reported that he is under constant surveillance in his new parish in the city of Trinidad. According to the priest, one month after his arrival, state security agents openly installed visible video cameras pointed at his home and church. The cameras allow the government to monitor all visitors received by the priest and serve to intimidate those who might want to visit him for pastoral care. This, the priest points out, affects all his parishioners. In addition to the state surveillance, Father José Conrado's email accounts are blocked, effectively cutting off his communication with the outside world.

Protestant church leaders of all denominations confirm to CSW that they are regularly threatened with the closure of their churches if they do not comply with government demands to expel and shun specific individuals. Many also report that members of their congregation have been approached and pressured, sometimes under threat, to file a complaint against the church leader. In cases where a church or church leader proves resistant to government pressure or threats, the government targets denominational leadership to deal with the 'problem'. One denominational leader expressed his frustration at this government interference in their churches:

I told [the Communist Party and religious affairs officials] that it is not for them to decide who may or may not worship in our churches. The doors of the church are open to all regardless of their political beliefs. Just as members of the Communist Party are welcome, so are those of other

political beliefs. Jesus Christ did not discriminate and neither will I.

The government also used other pressure tactics on religious churches and organisations in an attempt to force compliance. The case of the Trinidad Baptist Church in Santa Clara, which has featured in past CSW reports, and whose bank accounts by the government were frozen in 2010, is still unresolved. For many years the church has had a difficult relationship with the authorities, especially the ORA, because of the church leaders' refusal to comply with government demands to bar certain high profile dissidents, including Sakharov Prize winner Guillermo Fariñas, and their families from church activities. In 2010 long-time pastor and denominational leader Reverend Homero Carbonell stepped down, issuing an open letter in which he expressed his hope that by removing himself from a leadership position, the government would restore the church's access to the funds in its bank account: around US\$25,000 which had been donated for essential repairs to the historic church building. Unfortunately, four years on the accounts remain frozen, and the century-old building continues to deteriorate as the government appears intent on making the church an example to other religious groups of the consequences of defying its demands. Reverend Carbonell and his family continued to be targets of government harassment even after his retirement, pushing him finally to accept asylum in the US and go into exile in 2014.

Government attempts to enforce the social isolation of those they consider to be dissidents extend outside the walls of the church. In many cases, even when supported by the religious leader and congregation, dissidents choose to withdraw voluntarily from public involvement in a church in an attempt to avoid further difficulties for the church. However, church leaders do not cease to feel a religious obligation to provide religious care, and many continue to do so on an individual basis. In 2014 a number of religious leaders, including Reverend Mario Felix Leonart Barroso of the Western Baptist Convention and Pastor Yordani Santi of the Independent Evangelical Church, were on separate occasions detained, interrogated and threatened. They had attempted to visit Jorge Luis García Pérez, also known as Antúnez, and his wife Yris Pérez Aguilera, in Placetás, Villa Clara Province in order to provide them with pastoral care. In February 2014 Pastor Santi was arbitrarily detained by state security agents at the home of Antúnez and Pérez Aguilera, and interrogated for an hour. He reported that the state security agents told him "We don't want you in Placetás praying for anyone." The following day Pastor Santi was summoned to the state security unit at Remedios where he was interrogated for hours and threatened with imprisonment. The government did not restrict their attempts to isolate Antúnez and his wife to church leaders. On 5 July 2014 three members of the Bethel Baptist Church in Vueltas, Villa Clara, were beaten and arbitrarily detained in order to stop them visiting and

praying with Antúnez and his wife. The victims – a married couple, Niurcy Acosta and Raul González, as well as Juan Miguel Acosta – are all members of a church ministerial prayer group called Christians for Cuba.

In another incident on 4 June 2014, as Father Felix ben Castilla of the Vetero-Catholic Church and Reverend Andres Espinoza Merrera of the Episcopal Church were paying a pastoral visit to the dissident Librado Linares in Camajuani, Villa Clara, the home was surrounded by a mob including members of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR),⁴ police, and state security. The mob had been organised as an 'Act of Repudiation', government-orchestrated events meant to look like spontaneous expressions of public outrage, which usually involve aggressive verbal harassment, threats, vandalism and violence. The two church leaders were trapped inside for hours before the mob finally dispersed and they were able to return to their homes.

Local and national church leaders across the island also report that local authorities and/or CCP officials continue to approach them to seek their public support for government and CCP initiatives. Church leaders who have refused, on the grounds that the church should not be used for political purposes, have found themselves the target of campaigns of harassment.

PRESSURE TO SILENCE CRITICAL VOICES, AND INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Church leaders continue to complain of severe pressure on denominational leaders to silence critical voices within their religious groups. Over the past 19 months the authorities took aggressive action against those groups that failed to comply with official demands. In the past the government seemed most concerned with church leaders in denominations belonging to the CCC, which has historically played an important role in promoting an image abroad that the government respects religious freedom. However, in 2013 and the first half of 2014, leaders of all denominations, both within and outside the CCC, reported heavy pressure to silence or expel leaders who are vocal critics of the government and government policies.

One of the government's strategies to put pressure on religious groups has been to target the bank accounts of the uncooperative church. This is illustrated by the

⁴ The CDR acts as a kind of neighbourhood watch with a member or members of one household enforcing order and openly keeping tabs on the activities, relationships and political positions of their neighbours. The CDR representatives report to the Communist Party, state security, the police and other government officials.

aforementioned case of the Trinidad Baptist Church in Santa Clara, which has seen its bank accounts frozen since 2010 because of the leadership's refusal to expel dissidents, and because of their involvement in ecumenical activities lacking government authorisation. In 2013 the Cuban government issued a communiqué to religious groups that as of 1 January 2014, only one bank account per religious association or denomination would be permitted. Individual church accounts were to be eliminated or consolidated. As the Cuban government controls the bank which holds the accounts, this has, of course, increased the authorities' ability to pressure entire denominations to bring critical voices or church groups into line. In addition, for large and locally administered denominations like the Western and Eastern Baptist Conventions, which historically allow for high levels of autonomy on the individual church level, this creates onerous administrative burdens and effectively interferes with the denominations' internal structures and governance.

At the beginning of 2014 the government began the step by step process of consolidating individual church bank accounts to one per religious association or denomination. Thus far the measure has been applied only to CUC bank accounts, not accounts for Cuban pesos. However, as many churches receive and depend on donations in CUC from churches abroad this is already having a serious negative impact.

GOVERNMENT INFORMANTS

The use of government informants in churches, seminaries and other religious institutions continues to be widespread and persistent. Since 1959 the government has systematically planted informants in all religious congregations and institutions. The main responsibility of the informants appears to be to monitor the activities of the church, including the content of sermons, talks and comments, and to report anything perceived as counter-revolutionary or at all critical of the authorities. As a result, many church leaders practise a form of self-censorship, being careful not to say anything that might possibly be construed as anti-Castro or counter-revolutionary in their sermons and teaching. Reverend Jonni Tamayo Frometa, who leads the Second Baptist Church in the 'Airport Neighbourhood' of the city of Ciego de Avila, reported that he and his wife discovered a number of government plants in the church congregation, which is affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention. When they asked the government informants to leave, the pastor and his wife were strongly reprimanded by a local Communist Party official, Omar Martinez Arcia. The government policy of infiltrating religious groups extends beyond groups with a Christian identity. Lorenzo Hernández García, a member of a Yoruba Afro-Cuban religious society, told CSW that the government regularly sends agents to infiltrate and 'provoke division and disharmony' in their group in Placetas, Villa Clara.

It has been pointed out repeatedly by church leaders in Cuba that the government is sensitive to the role of religious groups in past overthrows of repressive regimes

in other parts of the world and is anxious to eliminate the possibility of any such scenario on the island. Religious leaders, as some of the only non-Communist Party members officially permitted to speak more or less publicly to groups of people in Cuba on a regular basis, are automatically viewed as a potential danger. The open and clandestine use of spies and informants in religious institutions aims to control that danger, and results in an intimidating atmosphere that in turn restricts the right of Cubans to worship freely, without hindrance, free from fear of the possible consequences should their sermons or prayers displease the authorities.

HARASSMENT OF AND ATTACKS ON CHURCH LEADERS

Church leaders of all denominations agree that, over the past few years, the government has increasingly focused on pressurising, harassing and intimidating individual church leaders. While these tactics have grown more and more overt in the past three years, this type of repression is, by its nature, very difficult to monitor and report. Threats most often consist of negative consequences such as limited educational opportunities for the target's children (e.g. being barred from attending university), or loss of job, vehicle or housing, if the target fails to cooperate with the authorities; and are almost always made verbally and without witnesses. For example, a Baptist pastor in Santiago de Cuba in July 2014 reported that they had received anonymous death threats made on their home landline. While he cannot prove that the threats came from the government, he points out that apart from the government officials who monitor and oversee the telephone lines, only a few trusted family members have the number. Based on information received from our sources in the country CSW believes that pressure on church leaders from government officials continued to increase significantly in 2013 and the first half of 2014.

Religious leaders report regular visits from state security agents, usually arriving in pairs unannounced at the leader's home, with the sole intention of intimidating them and making them aware that the government has all their activities under close surveillance. In some cities meetings with church leaders of all denominations have been convened repeatedly by high level officials. Once again, the only purpose of these meetings appears to be to remind them that they are being monitored. Reverend Argelio Matos Columbie, who leads a Baptist church in Arroyo Blanco, Jatibonico, Santi Spiritus Province, reported that his family and church are the victims of constant surveillance by CDR members and by individuals who cooperate with state security to report on who visits the pastor and 'what they talk about in their house'. Reverend Matos Columbie who is affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention complained that the government also regularly sends people to his home to attempt to discuss political issues, in order to trap him into saying something that could be considered counter-revolutionary.

Severe harassment including arbitrary detention seems to be reserved for church leaders who have been publicly

outspoken on issues related to religious freedom, or who have stood up to the authorities in other ways. Reverend Mario Felix Leonart Barroso of the Western Baptist Convention, and who oversees the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Taguayabon, Villa Clara, is an outspoken religious freedom and human rights defender who has been a particular target. On 25 January 2014 Reverend Leonart Barroso was detained in front of his wife and children, taken to the state security unit at Remedios and held for hours without charge. During his detention, finger- and toeprints, a scent sample and DNA samples were forcibly taken from him by state security agents. After his release he was put under house arrest in what appears to have been a widespread crackdown across the island during the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) conference which was held in Havana the same week. He received an official summons to present himself at the state security unit in Remedios on 1 February, and there were concerns that he would be charged with trumped up criminal offences. It is believed that his release from house arrest on 30 January and the sudden cancellation of the official summons was due to diplomatic pressure from Brazil.

On 6 June 2014 Reverend Leonart Barroso was again arbitrarily detained, this time while travelling in Villa Clara with an interdenominational group which had organised a series of concerts in celebration of Pentecost. When Reverend Leonart Barroso asked why he and two others, Father Felix ben Castilla and singer David Omni, were being detained, an agent told him it was for "being a bad father". Again, no charges were filed. A fortnight later Reverend Leonart Barroso and his wife Yoaxis Marcheco were detained by state security agents in Camajuani, Villa Clara. They were held and interrogated for two hours. Although they were released, again without charge, state security agents confiscated their two laptops, one of which contained most of their church's music, and a flash drive. The state security agents told them they needed the laptops to examine them for "evidence of illegal activity" on the part of Reverend Leonart Barroso and Mrs Marcheco Suarez.

The escalating harassment of Reverend Leonart Barroso and his wife in 2014 follows their high profile visit to Washington, DC in September 2013 to raise ongoing violations of religious freedom in Cuba. Their visit was officially endorsed, in writing, by the Western Baptist Convention. Following their return to Cuba, a defamation campaign referring to him derogatorily as 'the little pastor' was initiated in state media and on the internet, with pro-government writers accusing Reverend Leonart Barroso of "inventing stories of persecution" in Cuba, consorting with and accepting funding from terrorists, and of promoting a "theology of subversion".

Leaders of fast-growing independent churches and church groups have also been targeted for protracted and often intense campaigns of harassment. This orchestrated

harassment is often organised and carried out by local CDR and Communist Party officials. In the majority of these cases, religious leaders attempt to file complaints or to dialogue with local or national officials in order to defend their rights and to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, as is made clear in the cases below, government officials are often slow to act, or completely fail to act, to protect the rights of these religious groups and their leaders. In some cases they appear to actively collude with those responsible for the attacks. The widespread and consistent pattern of failure to act points to a government policy which tacitly approves these strategies, and the harassment of churches and their leaders.

CSW regularly receives reports of different forms of harassment including loud music played constantly at maximum volume with speakers aimed at the home of the church leader or church itself, as well as the sale of spirits and the organisation of government-sponsored street parties outside the doors of the targeted churches. In February 2013 a house church in the village of Sitiécito in Sagua la Grande, Villa Clara reported that each evening during religious services, churchgoers were surrounded by mobs shouting obscenities, throwing stones, playing music at high volume, and banging on the walls of the church during the service. Church leaders had attempted to resolve the issue by speaking to authorities, but no action was taken. On the contrary, the aggressors appeared to have the implicit support of local Communist Party and government officials.

In November 2013, in the village of Haiti in Camaguey Province, a church associated with the Apostolic Movement was holding a special three-day revival event. Government officials including state security agents, members of the military wearing civilian clothes and Communist Party officials organised a 'protest' in the area in front of the church. The government-led 'protest' included loudspeakers blasting music at the church in an attempt to drown out the sound of the preaching. According to church leaders, the government officials also distributed rum, beer and snacks outside the church "in order to attract more local people to their 'boycott' of the religious event and in an attempt to create an unpleasant atmosphere for the church."

In early 2014 a Baptist pastor in Potrerillo, Cruces, Cienfuegos Province, complained that a shop directly in front of his church had been given a permit to allow the sale of spirits (rum), in violation of the Cuban Civil Code. The result, according to Reverend Ariandys Aguiar del Sola, whose church is part of the Western Baptist Convention, is that "at certain times of day chaos reigns in the area". The pastor, his family and members of the church are regularly subjected to abuse from drunken customers. In addition, street parties with food and music are organised, and horses and cars are regularly parked in the doors of the church, impeding access. During church services the shop places a stereo outside and plays

loud music, disrupting the service. The church has made numerous complaints to the authorities, pointing out that the sale of spirits in that location is prohibited by zoning restrictions under the Cuban Civil Code; but to no avail. On one occasion, the police sarcastically told the pastor that he should hit the harassers with his Bible.

On 26 May 2014 the manager of the shop where spirits were sold was murdered, and the shop was temporarily closed. On 29 May representatives from the church met with regional and national religious affairs officials who assured them that if the shop reopened it would not be permitted to sell spirits, in line with the zoning code. However, on 25 June the shop reopened and immediately began selling rum, resulting in a resurgence of all the same problems, including intense harassment and interference with religious services. The pastor has made a public cry for support and denounced the failure of the Cuban government to uphold the law, concluding that this is a policy that has been approved by government officials in order to harass and intimidate the church.

In a second example Reverend Laico Vismar Dominguez, who leads a Baptist church in San Tomas, Ciego de Avila, reports that since 2012 he and his family have also been the victims of constant harassment. Reverend Vismar Dominguez, who is affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention, has accused a neighbourhood man known as 'Lalito' of working with the authorities and regularly inciting violent action against the church, the pastor and his family. At one point, Lalito attempted to drive a tractor into the church during a church service, while on another occasion, he and a group of men forced their way into the church using violence and tried to forcibly remove Reverend Vismar Dominguez from the pulpit as he was preaching.

As in other cases, the pastor filed a complaint with the national police and with the religious affairs office in Ciego de Avila Province. Government official Omar Martinez Arcia (also mentioned in the section above) imposed a nominal fine on those responsible for the violent acts, but the aggression and harassment continued. In March 2014, on a Sunday morning as the church was gathered for worship, Lalito's wife made her way to the front of the church and began to shout insults at the pastor and at different members of the congregation, calling them "shameless", "pigs" and "parasites"; she vowed to do everything in her power to see the church shut down. A short time later, local elected officials working with Lalito and others started a petition to eject the pastoral family from the community and to shut down the church. According to the pastor, religious affairs officials have a relationship with those trying to shut down the church and have taken no action. Reverend Vismar Dominguez reports that he and his family have been threatened with even more violent acts if they do not leave the neighbourhood and close the church.

In yet another case also in Ciego de Avila Province, Reverend Roinelvis Pupo Fornaris of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Crucero de Guayacanes, Majagua reports that he, his wife and their three-year-old daughter are the victims of threats, attacks and surveillance of all their

activities. The family receives constant threats of eviction from officials at the Ministry of Housing. They have also been verbally harassed by the local Assembly of People's Power⁵ delegate, who called the pastor a "parasite" and ridiculed his faith while they were queuing to buy milk and bread. The family is prevented from receiving water delivered to the community. In addition, the wife of the CDR president regularly deposits large, overflowing bags of rubbish – the contents of which include broken glass – in front of the family's home. When they tried to file a complaint, the insults and the threats of eviction increased. They continue to suffer constant harassment.

Finally, Reverend Tamayo Frometa, who is mentioned in the previous section, reports that a neighbour with close ties to government officials, Maria Teresa Cofino, has been harassing and threatening him for nine years. Although the pastor has filed numerous complaints with the National Revolutionary Police and with the Ciego de Avila Office for Religious Affairs, no action has been taken. On the contrary, Communist Party officials, including the aforementioned Omar Martinez Arcia, have responded by attempting to evict the family from their home and shut down the church.

Earlier this year government officials privately approached Reverend Tamayo Frometa and convinced him of a government plan to arrest all pastors in Ciego de Avila. They informed him that his name was first on the list because he was believed to be a US spy, and they warned him to leave Ciego de Avila. Frightened by this information, the pastor decided to take his holiday early and left with his family to go to Guantanamo Province. On the way, one of the car's tyres exploded, injuring the pastor. Before they were able to communicate news of the accident to the church in Ciego de Avila, they learned that the same government officials who had warned him to leave town had already addressed the church, informing the members of the congregation that Reverend Tamayo Frometa had had a car accident while attempting to abandon the church and that he was a 'false pastor'. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic church leaders across the island have reported acts of vandalism committed against their homes. Roman Catholic church leaders, a significant number of whom are foreign born, are particularly vulnerable to threats of deportation or non-renewal of their visas.

REFUSAL TO REGISTER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The government requires that churches and other religious groups register at their provincial office of the Registry of Associations, which is associated with the Ministry of Justice. However, church groups and other societies like the Freemasons fall under the authority of the ORA, which,

5 The Assemblies of People's Power are the higher local bodies of state power in the political-administrative divisions into which Cuba is divided. Therefore, they are invested with the highest authority for the exercise of their state functions within their respective boundaries. To this effect they govern in all that is under their jurisdiction and the law.

as explained previously, is part of the Central Committee of the CCP and not technically a government institution. The ORA has the final word on whether or not a group may register to obtain legal status. There is no official recourse for appeal in case of a negative decision.

There are approximately 54 state-registered denominations or church groups. More than half⁶ of these are members of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC), which has historically received some privileges in return for public support of the government. In theory, registration allows churches and religious leaders to receive foreign visitors, buy religious materials and meet in approved houses of worship. However, many church leaders report that the registration process is often made extremely difficult and is at times impossible. Groups like the Vetero-Catholic Church report that they have repeatedly been denied the right to register. Other groups, including the Berean Baptist Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses, both of which have a historic presence in Cuba predating the Cuban Revolution, had their registration arbitrarily stripped in the 1970s and have been blocked from re-registering, forcing them to operate illegally. Registered denominations characterised by a geographic component, such as the Eastern and Western Baptist Conventions, have reported that government and Communist Party officials are treating their affiliated missions or churches in areas outside their historic region as if they belonged to a non-registered religious group. One example includes the Eastern Baptist Convention-linked Christ Centre churches, and a seminary in the provinces of Sancti Spiritus and Villa Clara, which are historically associated with the Western Baptist Convention. Church leaders say that these churches are considered by local and regional government officials to be illegal, and that they are subjected to the more intense harassment and persecution normally reserved for religious groups without a historic, government-recognised presence on the island.

The Apostolic Movement, a very large and fast-growing network of independent Charismatic churches, has repeatedly had its attempts to register denied, forcing its churches to operate without legal status. In 2010 Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello of the ORA explained to a group of CCC religious leaders that the ORA aims to eradicate the Apostolic Movement from Cuba. The illegal status of the network leaves churches and church leaders associated with the Apostolic Movement vulnerable to harassment, threats of eviction, confiscation and destruction of church and personal property. In one example, on 8 November 2013 neighbours expropriated part of the property of Reverend Luis Yoel Balbuena Perez, a leader in the Apostolic Movement, while he was in another part of the

6 Although CCC denominations make up more than half of those registered, as far as membership numbers are concerned the CCC churches account for only a small percentage of the total number of Protestants in Cuba.

country. Both his church and his family's home are located on the same property in Guaimaro, Camaguey Province. Reverend Balbuena Perez lodged a complaint with the authorities; however, they sided with the neighbours in a written declaration. Included in the authorities' defence of the neighbour's actions was the phrase, "Balbuena and his wife are considered to be people who practice a certain religion that affects the tranquillity of the neighbourhood, therefore the administration thinks it prudent [to allow the expropriation to stand]."

One of the most egregious cases of the past 19 months is that of the Apostolic Movement church in the city of Camaguey. Since taking over leadership of the church, which also serves as the national headquarters of the Apostolic Movement and which was formerly led by Reverend Omar Gude Pérez, who accepted asylum in the US in January 2013, Reverend Yiorvis Bravo Denis has been the target of constant attack and harassment. Reverend Bravo Denis was fired from his job as an IT assistant, and was told it was because he was "untrustworthy". After he was fired, a meeting was held at ETECSA, his former place of employment, warning other employees that they should discontinue any relationship or friendship with Reverend Bravo Denis or his family or face losing their jobs as well. Government officials regularly threaten to evict him and his family from their home and to confiscate the property, despite their legal documentation proving ownership. He has been fined multiple times, leaving him and his family financially crippled.

In April 2013 Reverend Bravo Denis was detained and held incommunicado for ten hours. He was not charged but was threatened with the loss of his home. In May 2013 the Provincial Director of Housing, Leonel del Risco Franco, came to the family's home to inform them that the property would be confiscated and the family would be "extracted". In July 2013 María Esther Santana González, a legal expert at the Camaguey Provincial Ministry of Housing, representing Mr del Risco Franco, submitted a legal request to nullify ownership and remove Reverend Bravo Denis as owner of the property from the property register. In September 2013 Reverend Bravo Denis was cited to appear at the Ministry of Justice along with Reverend Omar Gude Pérez (who as pointed out above, is exiled from Cuba). During a 20 minute trial it was decided, despite all the legal, notarised documents proving ownership of the property, that Reverend Bravo Denis and his family should be evicted and the government should take over ownership of the property. The government notary who finalised the original documents signing over ownership to Reverend Bravo Denis, Lisbet Cabot Ronquillo, did not appear in court.

In October 2013 the government organised 'Acts of Repudiation' targeting the property which Reverend Bravo Denis, his family and members of the church had refused to abandon. For two weeks state security agents, police and paramilitary members dressed as civilians

surrounded the house, shouting insults and throwing rocks, eggs and other hard objects in an attempt to force them out of their home and church. On the evening of 26 October Reverend Bravo Denis received a summons to appear at the Ministry of Housing at 9.30am the next day, a Sunday, outside of normal government working hours. Ms Santana Gonzalez and Mr del Risco Franco offered to allow the family to stay in the property on condition that Reverend Bravo Denis agree to submit all church activities to government officials for their approval in advance, that he pay the government 300CUC (about £175), and that he acknowledge that the government was the actual owner of the property.

Reverend Bravo Denis refused these conditions and was again threatened with eviction and confiscation of the property. As of July 2014, the family remains in the home and the church continues to meet there. They receive constant threats of eviction and expropriation of the property.

SEMINARIES

There are some legally recognised and accredited seminaries in Cuba, including the long established Ecumenical Seminary in Matanzas known as SET, an Episcopalian-Presbyterian joint seminary with close ties to the CCC, and the Roman Catholic San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminary, inaugurated in late 2010. However, in addition to these, most denominations run their own seminaries in a kind of legal grey area. They have no formal accreditation in Cuba and the degrees obtained by their students are not recognised by the government, but most have been allowed to operate under certain restrictions. The Methodist Seminary established in Havana after the Methodists withdrew from SET in 2006 in protest at 'over-politicisation' of the seminary is one example. It is not possible to study theology in any state-run university.

Some of the non-accredited seminaries reported ongoing violations of religious freedom in 2014. The seminaries with the highest number of reported problems were affiliated with registered non-CCC denominations including the Pinos Nuevos denomination, the Eastern and Western Baptist Conventions and non-registered denominations such as the Apostolic Movement. Adding to the complexity, a Santa Clara-based seminary affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention but operating in an area historically dominated by the Western Baptist Convention (both legally recognised denominations), is treated by government officials as if it were affiliated with a non-registered denomination. These seminaries all report regular threats of eviction made by Housing Ministry officials and other government inspectors, frequently followed up with citations and burdensome fines. They also complain that state security agents regularly pose as students in an attempt to infiltrate the seminaries.

Many of these seminaries have been working with the Cuban Agency for Theological Studies (ACET) in order to establish a formal relationship with the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) and to gain

accreditation under the international umbrella of CETA. This, they maintain, is a reaction to the Cuban government's long standing refusal to allow them to operate with the same legal and accredited status as SET or the San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminary. However, these efforts have been met with hostility by the government, which has attempted to dictate which Cuban students may or may not participate in CETA affiliated courses. Representatives of the seminaries which are in the process of establishing ties with the CETA or which have already done so, say that government harassment and threats as described above have increased as a result of this new relationship.

RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT WITHIN CUBA

Government agencies often refuse to recognise a change in residence for pastors and other church leaders who have been assigned to a new church or parish and have had to relocate. Under Ministry of Housing regulations, it can be difficult if not impossible for pastors and their families to register their new place of residence, if transferred to a church which has lost its pastor due to death or retirement, for example. There are far more churches and missions than there are pastors or priests in Cuba, and the nature of their work means that most pastors and other church leaders in Cuba can expect to work in multiple locations over the course of their ministry. Most denominations continue the practice of assigning and transferring pastors to new locations, in some cases as often as every few years, because of frequent vacancies as older pastors retire, leave the country or pass away. A daily struggle with the bureaucracy, paperwork, and difficulties in travel is now considered to be part of the job description of a pastor because of their inability to reregister their place of residence.

The inability to reregister has implications for almost every aspect of life, including the receipt of government rations, education, participation in elections, and applications for religious visas for visitors from abroad. In order to do any of these things, pastors who have been refused the right to reregister must travel to wherever they are officially registered and submit the paperwork there. This is made particularly challenging as non-tourist transport infrastructure in Cuba continues to be virtually non-existent in many parts of the country, particularly from city to city.

Ministry of Housing officials told CSW that the law was originally put in place to prohibit the movement of Cubans from rural areas to the cities, where there are often more perceived opportunities for housing and employment. The regulation bans most state institutions from permanently transferring staff from city to city. Its application to civil society, in this case religious groups who have valid reasons for relocating pastors and priests, appears to be part of the general pattern of government attempts to control the activities and growth of religious groups as much as possible.

In July 2013 Pastor Lázaro Reynaldo Martínez Ches of the Christian Alliance Ministry publicly denounced the

government's refusal to register his place of residence in San Nicolás de Bari, Mayabeque Province. According to Pastor Martínez Ches, the family's lack of identity papers with an accurate address has had many negative repercussions. Without correct documentation the local school refused to allow his daughter to move up a grade and the local medical clinic has been unable to obtain their medical history. In addition, Pastor Martínez Ches was explicitly told by the local chief of police that no evangelism would be permitted in San Nicolás de Bari and that Pastor Martínez Ches would not be able to exercise his ministry, leading him to believe that the government's refusal to recognise his change of residence is a strategy to shut down his pastoral work in San Nicolás de Bari.

PERMISSION TO TRAVEL, LICENCES TO RECEIVE FOREIGN VISITORS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT PERMITS

On 14 January 2013 the Cuban government eliminated the requirement of a 'white card' or exit visa to leave the country. Some restrictions still remain and the government has reserved the right to deny permission to individuals to travel abroad if there is a perceived, but undefined, threat to national security. On 20 January 2013 Reverend Mario Travieso, who is affiliated with the Apostolic Movement, applied for and was denied a passport. He was told that the computer had categorised him as 'limited' but was given no other reason for the denial. In November 2013 another Apostolic Movement leader was stopped from travelling abroad. Reverend Bernardo de Quesada Salomon was at Havana airport on his way to attend a conference in the Dominican Republic when he was informed that his right to travel abroad had been revoked by the Cuban government, despite the fact that he had a passport, visa, tickets for the flight, and a letter of invitation. Reverend de Quesada Salomon was unable to obtain an explanation from government officials. He believes he was barred from travelling because he had made public calls for religious freedom in and outside of Cuba earlier in the year.

Church leaders continue to complain that the authorisation by the ORA of permits, for example to own and operate vehicles, continues to be linked to cooperation with government officials in other areas. Churches and church leaders perceived as uncooperative or resistant to government interference say they are punished by the denial of these permits. In 2013, over a nine month period, one major Protestant denomination was denied every application they submitted to the ORA to receive foreign visitors on religious visas. Their leaders believe this was the government's way of punishing them for 'uncooperative behaviour'. The punishment now appears to have come to an end, and since the beginning of 2014 they have been permitted to receive visitors on

religious visas. Church leaders complain that the arbitrary denial of these permissions is extremely difficult, usually impossible, to appeal.

Even when permits are granted there is no guarantee that they will not be withdrawn. In May 2014 Pastor Yanela Arias was phoned by a state security agent identifying himself as 'Mayor Enrique', and was cited to appear at the State Security Office of Operations in Santiago de Cuba the same day. At the State Security Office of Operations, Pastor Arias was interrogated about a construction licence another pastor (Alain de Toledano of the Apostolic Movement) had received for his family's home. The agents told Reverend Arias that they were investigating how it was possible that the permit had been issued, and accused the pastors and members of the church of bribing officials. Many members of the same church reported 'visits' to their home by government officials who attempted to force them to 'confess'.

HOUSE CHURCHES

There were ongoing violations in regard to house churches⁷ over the past 19 months. Over the past decade CSW has been told of different government initiatives to force denominations and churches to register all affiliated house churches. These attempts rarely seem to be implemented uniformly, if at all.⁸ At the same time, many churches which have attempted to register have been refused or have received no reply to their application. While it is difficult to obtain accurate numbers, CSW believes the majority of house churches, the number of which continues to grow, remain unregistered.

Historic registered denominations, in and outside of the CCC, reported mixed experiences. While most were able to register some house churches in 2013 and 2014, the same groups said many other applications were refused or received no reply. The inconsistencies were reported within the same denominations, across the island and even within the same cities. Church leaders are worried that many of their affiliated house churches remain vulnerable to threats of forced closure and confiscation, as long as the government refuses to register them as places of worship.

7 In Cuba the term 'house church' is used to refer to any building that is not registered but is used for religious activities. This can include houses that are used for both residential and religious purpose, houses that are used only for religious purposes, non-residential buildings and relatively new buildings that were constructed in order to provide a locale for religious activities. House churches are characteristic of all Christian denominations, though Catholics also refer to them as Houses of Prayer or Houses of Reflection.

8 Many church leaders express concern that these registration drives always involve handing over lengthy and detailed lists with personal information on all active members to government officials, a requirement with which many feel uncomfortable.

CSW remains concerned that Directive 43 and Resolution 46, which were issued in April 2005 and imposed complicated and repressive restrictions on house churches, are still in force. While the legislation never appears to have been implemented in any uniform way, church leaders have expressed concerns that it gives government officials the power to enforce it arbitrarily. The legislation, if applied, has the potential to close down a large percentage of house churches.

The legislation states that two house churches of the same denomination will not be allowed to exist within two kilometres of one another. It further stipulates that detailed information – including the number of worshippers, dates and times of services, and the names and ages of all inhabitants of the house in which services are held – must be provided to the authorities. Once authorisation is granted, the legislation plainly states that the authorities will supervise the operation of meetings. The directive then goes on to explain that if the authorities, in the course of their observation, find that the requirements for the functioning of a house church are not being met, they can suspend meetings in the house for one year or more. If a complaint is registered against a church, it can be shut down permanently and attendees may be subject to imprisonment.

The legislation also explicitly prohibits non-Cubans from participating, which includes simply being present, in a religious service without first seeking official permission in the form of a religious visa. Foreigners are prohibited altogether from involvement with house churches in mountainous regions. Any violation of this clause will result in fines of 1,000 CUC (the equivalent of £585), a huge sum for Cubans, who earn on average less than £12 per month. The fine will be applied both to the foreigner in question and to the church leader responsible, and the house church will be shut down.

Lastly, even if a house church receives authorisation to operate, it must stay within the limits imposed by the authorities. Rooms within the house that have not been approved may not be used by the house church, nor may the church members meet on the roof, a common practice in Cuba both because of the heat and because of a general lack of space. The law gives the authorities the right to dictate how many people may meet in any given house church, which effectively puts a stop to any church growth. Finally, if the house is legally registered to someone who is not an active member of the church, even if they have given their permission and are happy for the church to meet there, it will be shut down.

While the majority of house churches are affiliated with a historic, recognised denomination, the number of independent house churches or house churches linked to unrecognised religious groups has grown in recent years. As these newer groups did not exist prior to 1959, they lack registered buildings designated for religious use; as such their entire physical infrastructure consists of house churches. These are a particular target of the government and are especially vulnerable as they lack a recognised religious covering.

As mentioned previously, in 2010 Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello spoke to CCC leaders in Havana and stated clearly that the ORA, presumably with the backing of the government, was working to shut down all new religious groups, singling out the Apostolic Movement network and the Growing in Grace religious group. In her speech, a covert recording of which was passed to CSW,⁹ she specified that this would be done through the confiscation and destruction of homes where religious activities are held. This policy has not changed over the past four years, and in 2013 and 2014 churches affiliated with these groups regularly reported receiving threats from local officials that their buildings would be shut down, confiscated or destroyed. In one example in February 2014, Reverend Carlos Hernandez of the Apostolic Movement was told to move his family out of their home and church in the Abel Santa Maria neighbourhood in Boyero, Havana, and threatened with forced eviction if he failed to do so.

Similarly, on 28 March 2014 Reverend Carlos Alberto Montoya Palomino of the Bet-El Shalom Church located in the 10 de Octubre Municipality of Havana and which is also associated with the Apostolic Movement, received a visit from a government official from the Physical Planning Office, who informed him that if they did not stop holding religious services on the property the family would be evicted. The property, which serves as both the church and the pastoral home, has been in Reverend Montoya Palomino's possession for 26 years. It has been used for religious services for three years. After receiving this threat Reverend Montoya Palomino went to the People's Power Directorate at the municipal government, where he spoke to a religious affairs official called 'Julian' who claimed no knowledge of the Physical Planning Office's actions and said he was unable to assist him. Reverend Montoya Palomino then went to the Communist Party Office and requested a meeting with Religious Affairs, but to no avail.

In another similar case on the other side of the country, on 20 May 2014 in Palo Gordo, Guama, Santiago de Cuba, a pastoral couple affiliated with the Apostolic Movement received a note left at their home by government officials. The note threatened them "a thousand different ways" and warned that if they did not close the church, the family, which includes the pastoral couple, their three children, daughter-in-law and grandson, would be evicted from the property.

GENERAL DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RELIGION

Christians in Cuba continue to report varying levels of discrimination in educational institutions and in their places of employment. Levels of discrimination, however, tend to vary from region to region and seem to be strongly linked to the attitude of local and regional authorities. Some church leaders do not believe that there is a central government policy to discriminate actively against all Christians. At the same time, they

point out that the government openly tolerates such discrimination and employers and officials responsible for discriminating against religious Cubans are unlikely to face any consequences for their actions.

There is however no question that individuals associated with certain groups viewed by the government as problematic, such as the Apostolic Movement, are singled out for discrimination. As noted in the section 'Harassment of and attacks on church leaders' (see p.14), employees at the Camaguey offices of ETECSA were explicitly told that they risked losing their jobs if they maintained any kind of relationship with local Apostolic Movement pastor Reverend Yiorvis Bravo Denis. In another example, in October 2013 an Apostolic Movement church organised a crusade in El Cristo, Santiago de Cuba. On the day of the event revolutionary and political police surrounded the venue in an attempt to intimidate people and prevent them participating. According to the organisers around 400 people attended despite the actions of the government; however, they were threatened, some suffered physical violence, and it appears that government agents recorded the names of many of those in attendance. Many of those at the event were subsequently fired from their jobs.

Religious leaders of all denominations tend to agree that Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses face particular problems. Students from these two religious groups are often singled out for ridicule and harassment by teachers and other students for their refusal to take part in compulsory patriotic activities or other activities on the Sabbath. Many have reportedly been denied entrance to university, and some who were admitted reported being suspended from the institutions later on. Adventists also face particular difficulties in academic institutions and at work because of their refusal to work on a Saturday, which they consider to be a holy day. Compulsory military service is a problem for the Jehovah's Witnesses whose beliefs proscribe all participation in military service.

Non-Christian Cubans have also reported cases of discrimination. In a particularly worrying case in July 2013 a Muslim Cuban, Abdul Ráman (previously named Lázaro Fresneda Fernández), was arbitrarily detained. According to Mr Ráman, he was observing Ramadan prayers when three state security agents forced their way into his house. He was taken in a state security (DSE) car to the Villa Marista Maximum Security Prison where he was held for 12 days. During this time he was interrogated about his private life, his conversion to Islam, the number of Muslims in Cuba, and what kind of support they receive from the Saudi Arabian and Turkish embassies. He said he was not asked about anything to do with terrorism but rather about the presence of Muslims on the island.

Officially, all university courses are open to any Cuban of any religion (in contrast to pre-1991 when Christians were barred from studying medicine, psychology, journalism or education); however, CSW sources say that discrimination

⁹ Video available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8QmvquACBM>

against religious believers in higher education still occurs. In May 2014 Missionary Gretel Elena del Toro Borges who, along with her husband, leads a church affiliated with the Christ Centre Ministry¹⁰ in Guayos, Sancti Spiritus, was barred from enrolment in a university psychology course in Cabaiguan, Sancti Spiritus. While she was given no official reason, contacts in the university explained to her that it would be 'inappropriate' for a pastor affiliated with an unrecognised religious group to study psychology. According to church leaders, discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs is still widespread in primary and secondary schools. This discrimination is heightened when parents, and particularly pastors, attempt to exempt their children from Communist ideology programmes and school activities which clash with days of worship. According to Reverend Jonni Tamayo Frometa of the 2nd Baptist Church in Ciego de Avila, his children, ages 12, 10 and 7 are regular victims of persecution at school because of their refusal to attend Communist ideology programmes. He complained they are ridiculed by their teachers and sent to the principal's office for being Christians in order to make an example of them to other students.

Pastors who attempt to intercede on behalf of children experiencing discrimination often becomes targets themselves. Reverend Samuel Matos Hinojosa of the El Salvador 2nd Baptist Church in Paraguay, Guantanamo, has repeatedly had to intervene with the local school which, he says, intentionally schedules obligatory activities on Sundays in order to prevent the children from attending church. In response to his interventions Reverend Matos Hinojosa and members of his congregation have been the victims of surveillance, denunciations, arbitrary detention, interrogations and pressure from the authorities and Communist Party officials. In addition, Reverend Matos Hinojosa, who is affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention, has been frequently detained without charge while travelling to and from Paraguay.

Another Eastern Baptist Convention pastor in Arroyo Blanco, Jatibonico, Santi Spiritus reports similar experiences. Reverend Argelio Matos Columbie comes into regular conflict with the teachers and directors of the school attended by his children and other children from the church, because the school refuses to release the children to attend church activities. According to Reverend Matos Columbie, the teachers have instead focused on teaching Communist ideology to the children who attend church, warning them that if they continue to attend church they will never be able to have a good career.

10 Missionary Gretel Elena del Toro Borges and her husband Orelvis Rodriguez Hernandez have experienced problems going beyond her exclusion from the university course. The Christ Centre Ministry, which is linked to the Eastern Baptist Convention, is not recognised by the authorities. The couple is under constant threat of eviction from their home which also serves as the church. The missionary family reports that they are also under constant surveillance by state security agents.

Despite a 1991 reform which permitted Christians to join the CCP and which outlawed discrimination on the basis of religion, systematic discrimination persists. Much of the discrimination experienced by Christians is rooted in the reluctance of many to join the CCP, which they still consider to promote an anti-religious ideology. It should also be noted that some churches will not allow members of the CCP to become full church members. There are often only very limited opportunities for non CCP members, including Christians, as CCP membership continues to be key to professional and academic advancement in Cuba. Church leaders report that it is common for Christians to be passed over for promotion, excluded from important meetings and activities, demoted and/or transferred to undesirable locations because, as Christians and as non-members of the CCP, they are considered 'untrustworthy'.

Cubans who take steps to leave the CCP officially after converting to Christianity face particular discrimination. Christians who have chosen to leave the CCP have reported being visited at home by party officials who threatened them with potential repercussions for them and/or for family members. The most commonly reported threat is that their children will not be accepted into university.

Restrictions on members of the Cuban security agencies including the military and the police have reportedly been somewhat relaxed in some parts of the country. In the past, members of the Cuban security agencies were banned from participation in any religious activity and were not allowed to have Bibles in their possession. However, some churches report that they now have members of the police force in their congregations, something which would have been unheard of just a few years ago. While church leaders also report that retired members of the military are joining their churches, apparently without problem, they did not believe that active personnel would be permitted to do so. CSW continues to receive reports of young Christians carrying out their compulsory military service being singled out for intense harassment, or forced to undergo particularly gruelling exercises.

BUILDING RESTRICTIONS

With a few exceptions, the government, through the ORA and the Ministry of Housing, continues to restrict severely the construction of new church buildings. The government has permitted the construction of a very limited number of new churches across the country since 1959. This, together with the fact that it is technically illegal to organise religious activities in buildings not officially registered for religious use, means that many Christian communities do not have a legal place to meet for church services. This particularly affects those in more remote rural areas. In light of the rapid increase in the number of practising Christians in Cuba over the past 20 years, this constitutes a serious religious freedom violation in that it prohibits many Cuban Christians from freely exercising their right to come together for worship.

Most, but not all, of the churches that were built prior to the Cuban Revolution have been allowed to continue to

function as places of religious activity. Any changes to the structure including expansions and/or repairs and renovations, however, may be carried out only with the permission of the ORA. Church leaders reported that in recent years authorisation has been granted more frequently; however, repairs and renovations are difficult to carry out because of a lack of affordable building materials. In some cases, the government has refused to allow Cuban churches to receive donations in the form of materials from abroad and in other cases has confiscated such materials upon arrival. In some cases, like that of the Trinidad Baptist Church outlined in the section 'Social isolation and pressure on church leaders' (see p.9), donated funds and goods for repairs have been frozen or have disappeared, preventing their use. In practice, this means that many church buildings are far too small to accommodate their congregations or are now structurally unsound.

In the wake of the Pope's visit to the island in 2012, the government announced that the Roman Catholic Church would be given permission to construct a limited number of new buildings. In late 2013 the Roman Catholic Church announced that a number of properties confiscated after the Cuban Revolution had been returned.¹¹ Around the same time, the Methodist Church was permitted to build a new church in Ciego de Avila, with the financial and physical help of a US church.¹²

While these positive moves have been interpreted by some as indicative of improvement in the area of religious freedom, CSW views these developments as problematic. The right to build new churches is not extended to other denominations or religious groups, and the government continues to refuse to return, and even continues to expropriate, properties belonging to other religious groups. The case of the Eastern Baptist Church in Arroyo Blanco, Jatibonico, Santi Spiritus is one example. The historic building was confiscated by the government after the Cuban Revolution and today is in the hands of a tobacco factory. Meanwhile, the pastor and congregation are forced to meet in an unregistered house church where they are constantly threatened with eviction and forced closure.

Another egregious case which has featured in previous CSW reports is that of the Yaguajay Baptist Church. The land adjacent to the church is the legal property of the Western Baptist Convention and was the Baptist high school prior to the Cuban Revolution. It was illegally confiscated by the government in 2012, in an act that many believed was punishment for the refusal of the convention to agree to various demands by the ORA to restructure their internal governance and to expel a number of pastors designated by the ORA. Despite international pressure the property was not returned, and in 2014 new government constructions on the land were

finished and handed over to two government companies: Unión Eléctrica and Seprot. According to Reverend Yuri Castellanos, who has led the church through this experience, all the legal rights regarding the property were ignored by the government. The Ministry of Housing refused to provide the church with a copy of the deed which establishes the limits of the property, although numerous official requests were submitted personally by the president of the Western Baptist Convention, Pastor Juan Carlos Rojas. Under Cuban law the ministry must provide these documents to the owners of property when requested. Reverend Castellanos continues to be under constant surveillance and frequently receives threats from government officials.

Returning buildings to some groups and allowing others to build new places of worship, while simultaneously denying this right to other groups and even illegally expropriating property belonging to some religious organisations, creates a situation of religious inequality, not religious freedom, and reinforces the government's control over the construction of any building for religious use. It also avoids addressing the root cause of the problem, which is that the ORA and the Ministry of Housing consistently block legitimate and legal requests for building or renovation permits. The government continues to arbitrarily confiscate church property and there appears to be no recourse for those affected to appeal these decisions. Some religious groups in Cuba have expressed deep concern at this development, and continue to ask that the government return all buildings confiscated from religious groups after the Cuban Revolution, establish legal mechanisms to simplify and regularise the application process for such permits, and provide deeds and other documentation on existing property to all religious groups.

DESTRUCTION OF CHURCH PROPERTY

CSW continued to receive news of threats to destroy, and the actual destruction of, church property. These cases occurred in many parts of the island, but were particularly frequent in rural areas. Churches affiliated with the Apostolic Movement reported the highest number of these cases. In the most serious case, on 2 July 2014 Cuban government agents including state security and Cuban Communist Party officials, destroyed a church and home affiliated with the Apostolic Movement in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba. The unannounced demolition of the Establishing the Kingdom of God Church began at 6am while the owners of the home and their young children were sleeping inside. Pastor Marcos A Perdomo Silva, who leads the church but who was not in Cuba at the time of the state action told the blog Religión

11 *Havana Times*, 'Cuba Returns Catholic Church Properties', 2 May 2014 <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=103396>

12 *Valley Morning Star*, 'Church & State: Methodist group builds church in Cuba', 25 October 2013 http://www.valleymorningstar.com/news/local_news/article_eb015602-3df2-11e3-a853-0019bb30f31a.html?TNNNoMobile

en Revolución¹³ that "...they arrived and violently broke down the front door which was locked, the police entered with batons alongside a group of men carrying machetes. They began to destroy and occupy the properties of the pastor and the church."

Photos taken at the scene show uniformed officers directing a bulldozer levelling the area where the church and home stood. According to Pastor Perdomo Silva, state security agents and police dressed in civilian clothes used patrol cars, ambulances and trucks to cordon off the block, located in the Jose Marti District, Micro 10, during the operation. Pastor Perdomo noted that the trucks were also used to carry away the contents of the home and church. When members of the church attempted to break through the barriers, their identification documents were confiscated and they were threatened with arrest. The owner of the home, who also acts as a leader in the church, Pastor Esmir Torreblanca, his wife, and his two children aged two and seven were left homeless. The Establishing the Kingdom of God Church had been threatened with confiscation and demolition in March 2014, but local officials appeared to back down after the case received international attention. Pastor Perdomo Silva believes the government took advantage of his absence to proceed with the operation. The following Sunday, members of the church met at the site for open air worship.

PUBLIC AND SOCIAL MINISTRY

Virtually all church groups consider public and social ministry to be fundamental to their identity. This is perhaps where government control is most rigid. When permission is given, it is only to specific groups for specific events; the right to public manifestation is not extended to all. Church leaders have long complained that requests to carry out public events, for example religious processions and evangelistic work, are rarely granted. There have been some recent exceptions, the majority of which involve the Roman Catholic Church; the huge public Masses held during Pope Benedict XVI's visit in 2011 being one example.

However, other church groups and associations report that the government is as restrictive as ever and in some cases more so when it comes to granting authorisation for public events. In addition, Freemasons, who also come under the authority of the ORA, reported that they have been repeatedly denied permission to hold public parades. Most groups reported that official requests for permission to hold public events regularly received no response.

In cases where religious groups carried out public activities without permission, they met with severe

consequences. An interdenominational group of pastors and church leaders from the city of Bayamo in eastern Cuba were fined, beaten and arrested by state security agents on a monthly basis as they attempted to pass out gospel tracts at the bus station and to carry out public evangelism in the streets of the city. In May 2013 Pastor Julio Magaña Sánchez and other members of the group went to the municipal Communist Party Headquarters and requested an interview with the ORA. The group was attempting to make a legal complaint regarding a beating of members of the group by state security forces a week earlier. This attempt was refused and the group was physically thrown out of the office. In December 2013 at least six members of the group were beaten and arrested when they attempted to carry out street evangelism. National Revolutionary Police beat and then detained the group, under directions from State Security, accusing them of 'public disorder'. The group was held for nine hours in a windowless cell without ventilation or artificial light before being released without charge.

Most religious groups in Cuba engage in some kind of social ministry, but this too has been hampered by government restrictions. The ministry may include the distribution of food, medicine and clothing to those in need, and homes for the elderly. Church leaders report that government officials often perceive this as competition for their own services. This is aggravated when, as is often the case, the local government agencies do not have the materials necessary to provide the services but the churches do. On 1 July 2014 a group of churchgoers in Bayamo was carrying out community clean up – an activity they have undertaken for 15 years as part of their ministry, as there is no waste pickup service to the neighbourhood. Police arrived and attempted to stop them cleaning up. When they were unable to do so, they violently arrested Pastor Armando Guerra Martinez, handcuffed him and took him to the station, where state security agents interrogated him for hours and threatened to post false charges (of theft of construction materials) against him. After two hours he was released and fined 100 pesos (approximately one week's wages).

DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS MATERIALS

Christian leaders continue to complain of a scarcity of Bibles and other religious literature. The lack of Bibles is most acute in rural areas but also appears to be a significant problem in the cities. Based on reports received by CSW, it appears to be a major problem for all denominations, including Roman Catholics and Protestants both within and outside the CCC.

The shortage is a result of harsh government restrictions on the import of Bibles and other religious materials and a lack of access to printing infrastructure on the island. The restrictions stipulate that within Protestant denominations, all religious literature, including Bibles, must be imported into the country under the auspices of the CCC – despite the fact that it represents only a minority of Protestant Christians. Roman Catholics also report difficulties in importing Bibles and have, on

13 *Religion en Revolución* <http://religionrevolucion.blogspot.com/>

occasion, also been obliged to work with the CCC to bring Bibles into the country.

According to CSW sources inside Cuba, the import of Bibles and religious literature in 2014 has decreased considerably in relation to previous years. They blame the continued insistence by the ORA that all imports of Bibles and religious literature go via the CCC whether or not the churches/denominations involved are members of the CCC. In one example, a container of Bibles and religious literature sent by the Doral Jesus Worship Centre in Miami was ready to be delivered in early 2013 but has yet to be sent, because of obstacles imposed by the CCC despite reported personal assurances to the church by Ms Diego Bello of the ORA that the shipment had been approved.

ACCESS TO THE MEDIA

Unless they receive specific authorisation, Cuban and joint enterprises may not sell computers, facsimile machines, photocopiers, or other equipment to any church except at official, artificially high prices. In addition, many religious organisations are denied internet access. This establishes a virtual state monopoly on printed media – those church organisations and other independent organisations which do have access to a printing press are heavily monitored.

Many observers speculate that the closure of the Centre for Religious and Civic Formation in Pinar del Rio and the shutting down of the publications *Vitral* (Pinar del Rio) and *Bifronte* (Holguín) some years ago were the result of intense pressure from the government on the church hierarchy. There continues to be heavy government pressure on Roman Catholic publications to stay away from themes perceived to be 'political' by the authorities. In spring 2014 the two editors of Roman Catholic publication *Espacio Laical*, Roberto Veiga and Lenier Gonzalez, issued a public letter explaining that they were resigning because of internal pressure within the Church to stop discussing political issues. This was a worrying development as these kinds of publications are considered to be one of the only examples of semi-independent press, and are read by Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic readers alike. It may indicate that pressure on religious groups to silence publicly critical or even questioning voices remains strong.

Church leaders of all denominations also continue to express unhappiness at the continued lack of access to the media for religious groups. This is exacerbated by a widely held perception that the state media gives ready access to Afro-Cuban religions under the pretext that their activities are cultural rather than religious.¹⁴ There continue to be some notable exceptions to the general lack of access to the media; CCC leaders are sometimes invited onto political shows such as 'Mesa Redonda' and are occasionally granted permission to broadcast messages or sermons. CSW views the granting of media rights to some groups and not to others on a seemingly

arbitrary basis to be deeply problematic and promoting religious inequality, not religious freedom.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

In September 2009 the government announced that it would allow Protestant and Roman Catholic religious services to be held in Cuban prisons. CSW is unaware of any provision for non-Christian faiths. Church leaders in Cuba greeted the news with caution. Protestants were initially critical of the fact that sole responsibility for Protestant services and prison ministry was given to Reverend Francisco Rodés, a pastor from the CCC, which represents only a small minority of Protestant Christians on the island. However, according to CSW sources, Reverend Rodés took great care to include church leaders from all denominations, in and outside of the CCC, in the training required to receive government approval to carry out prison ministry.

Unfortunately, despite these positive developments, it appears that the many concerns about how this reform would be implemented were valid. The government still reserves the right to override denominational and church designations and arbitrarily bar specific pastors who graduated from the training course from involvement in prison ministry. Implementation has not been uniform in prisons across the country. In some cases the right to hold religious services has been denied outright. In other cases services were allowed, only to be interrupted and cancelled midway.

Importantly, political prisoners continue for the most part to be prevented from taking part in these services. In some cases authorities claimed that only prisoners who had exhibited 'good behaviour' could attend, and arbitrarily claimed that political prisoners did not qualify. In other cases, political prisoners were told that participation in religious services was contingent on wearing the prison uniform. Most political prisoners refuse to wear the prison uniform for reasons of conscience. In many cases, however, no reason was given.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that some Afro-Cuban religious leaders are also unhappy with the government's promotion of their beliefs and rituals to tourists as 'cultural patrimony' and view it as a commercialisation of sacred beliefs and practices.

CONCLUSION

The continued deterioration in respect for religious freedom in Cuba over the past 19 months, even as the government continues to promote an image of respect for religious freedom, is deeply troubling. The negative trend seems to be part of a more general attempt by the government to eliminate the potential for any social upheaval by cracking down on any and all groups that are calling or could call for social and political reforms, alongside the limited economic reforms the government has enacted. Many observers were quick to interpret the Pope's visit in March 2012, and subsequent promises by the government to concede a few privileges to the Roman Catholic Church, as evidence of a new commitment to religious freedom, but this is unfortunately a far cry from the reality on the ground. On a weekly basis CSW receives reports of violations of religious freedom, ranging in severity and coming from a wide spectrum of religious groups including Afro-Cuban societies, Roman Catholics, Vetero-Catholics and Protestant churches of all denominations. Based on the first half of 2014, where numbers of reported religious freedom violations almost matched the total for the whole of 2013 (which in turn saw a 50% increase from the previous year) it seems unlikely that the government has any intention of making real improvements in the area of religious freedom.

Over the past decades the Castro regime has proved adept at sleight of hand tricks to convince the international community that it is committed to improvements in the human rights situation. Its approach to religious freedom has been no different. If the situation for all religious groups in Cuba is to improve at all, it is imperative that the European Union and the United States and other governments around the world do not allow the Cuban government to pretend that granting limited privileges to one or two religious group over others constitutes an improvement in religious freedom. This is especially the case when these privileges have no basis in any legal reforms, but are only one-off handouts given by a government which retains the right to rescind them at any time. Progress in religious freedom should be measured in terms of how all religious groups benefit, and should also be grounded in legal systems and protections that will uphold these rights for all without discrimination or favouritism.

APPENDIX I: INDEX OF ACRONYMS AND TRANSLATIONS

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| CCC | Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba, or Cuban Council of Churches |
| CCP | Partido Comunista de Cuba, or Cuban Communist Party |
| CDR | Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución, or Committees for Defence of the Revolution |
| CUC | Convertible Cuban Pesos |
| ICCPR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights |
| ICECSR | International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights |
| ORA | Office of Religious Affairs |

APPENDIX II: BACKGROUND ON HOUSE CHURCHES

During the 1990s the shortage of space designated for religious activity, coupled with the rapid growth of all denominations, led to the widespread use of 'house churches'. The term 'house church' is fairly broad; while it can refer to structures that are still primarily used as family homes but are also used on certain days for church services, it can in addition be applied to homes that are no longer lived in and are solely dedicated to religious activities. In Cuba the term also includes buildings that were constructed without specific permission to be used for religious activities.

The size of individual house churches varies greatly. Some have only a handful of regular attendees while others have congregations which number in the hundreds. It is impossible to know for certain the exact number of house churches on the island; however, church leaders inside Cuba put the number at anywhere between 10,000 and 15,000.

Few house churches have been granted formal authorisation to carry out religious activity. In Cuba, where freedom of assembly and association are still severely restricted, this carries obvious risks. Meetings of more than 15 people at a time are technically illegal. Some churches have attempted to get around this rule by establishing multiple house churches and limiting the maximum number of attendees at each to 14. Others keep no written records of addresses and names of house church hosts, and change their locations frequently.

APPENDIX III: CUBAN RELIGIOUS PANORAMA

Precise numbers of religious practitioners in Cuba are difficult to obtain. Based on numbers self-reported by Cuban denominations and provided to CSW, CSW believes that approximately 6.5% of the population is actively involved in a Roman Catholic congregation and between 13% and 15% in Protestant churches. Around 80% of the population is thought to be involved to some degree in Afro-Cuban religious practices, of which there are numerous sects. There are very small Jewish, Christian Orthodox and Muslim communities, and some Eastern and New Age religions are represented. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are also present.

Excluding Orthodox Christians who are not widely distributed on the island, Cuban Christians can essentially be divided into four categories:

1. Roman Catholics;
2. Registered Protestant denominations and church groups within the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC);
3. Registered Protestant denominations outside the CCC;
4. Non-registered, unrecognised denominations and religious groups.

The majority of Protestant Cubans belong to the third category, registered Protestant denominations outside the CCC: a group that includes the Western and Eastern Baptist Conventions and the Assemblies of God churches, the three largest Protestant groups on the island.

Member denominations, churches and associations of the Cuban Council of Churches are as follows:

Member Denominations and Churches

Methodist Church in Cuba
Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba
Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ
Christian Pentecostal Church
Christian Reformed Church
Church of Christ
Church of God in Cuba
Church of the Friends (Quakers)
Church of the Nazarene
Congregational Pentecostal Church
Episcopal Church (Anglican)
Evangelical Church Gethsemane
Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession
Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba
Free Baptist Convention
Free Evangelical Church
Global Mission Church
Light of God Pentecostal Church
Methodist Church
Missionary Church of God
Pentecostal Holiness Church
Presbyterian-Reformed Church
Rural Brotherhood Church
Salvation Army

CCC Member Ecumenical Groups and Centres

Baptist Workers 'Student Coordination'
Christian Centre for Reflection and Dialogue
Christian Peace Conference
Evangelical Theological Seminary
Augusto Cotto Information and Study Centre
Interdenominational Fellowship of Evangelical Ministers and Pastors of Cuba (CIMPEC)
Koinonia Movement
Latin-American Ecumenical Social Action (ASEL)
Dr Martin Luther King Memorial Centre
Student Christian Movement
Study Commission on the History of the Church in Latin America (CEHILA)
Union of Latin-American Ecumenical Youth (ULAJE)

Observers

Open Bible Church
World-wide Missions (Misiones Amplias Mundial)
Greek Orthodox Church

Fraternal Associates

Autonomous Bethel Church
Church of the Moravian Brethren in Cuba
Hebrew Community of Cuba
International Christian Community
Pentecostal Church of Sovereign Grace in Cuba
United Church
Yoga Association of Cuba