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## CUBA | Pastor Imprisoned, Held Without Charge

The family of Rev. Jesús Noel Carballeda, the 44 year-old Cuban pastor of an unregistered church in Havana, is calling for his release from Valle Grande prison in San Antonio de los Baños, Havana Province, where he has been imprisoned for approximately a month without charge.

Rev. Carballeda's wife, Teresa Castillo Medina, told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) the pastor was imprisoned five years ago for four months after militant communist neighbors filed legal complaints about the church services they held in their home in Marianao, Havana. Following his imprisonment, he was put on probation and made to check in with the authorities on a regular basis. They were barred from holding church services in their home, but Rev. Carballeda continued to lead his church, holding services in parks, rented halls and other private homes. His wife believes this is the reason behind his re-arrest.

Rev. Carballeda's church is linked to the Apostolic Movement, a fast growing network of protestant churches, which the Cuban government has refused to register. Because the religious group is unregistered, all of the affiliated church's activities are technically illegal and they are unable to apply for permits for a designated place of worship. Castillo Medina told CSW, "We do not want to bother anyone. We just need a place to worship. We are forced to meet in the open air, in parks or rented rooms as [the authorities] will not give us legal recognition."

The detention of Rev. Carballeda is part of a larger crackdown on religious freedom in Cuba over the past few years. In 2014, CSW documented 220 separate cases of religious freedom violations, up from 185 in 2013 and 120 in 2012. Unregistered religious groups have been a particular target of government repression, with religious leaders reporting harassment, fines and threats of confiscation or destruction of property.

A church in the city of Santiago, which is affiliated to the Apostolic Movement, was destroyed by the government in July 2014. Two Apostolic Movement leaders, Rev. Yiorvis Bravo Denis in Camaguey, and Rev. Alain Toledano, have also denounced ongoing threats by the government to confiscate their homes. In 2010, Caridad Diego, the director of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party Office for Religious Affairs, which has authority over all religious activity in Cuba, was caught on camera explaining in detail how the government planned to eradicate the Apostolic Movement and other unregistered religious groups from the island. Another Apostolic Movement leader, Rev. Omar Gude Perez, was sentenced to six and a half years of imprisonment on trumped up charges in 2008. He was released following an international campaign in 2011 and received asylum in the US with his family in 2013.

Castillo Medina called for support for her husband, "We just want him home. Our family needs him home. Our church needs him home."

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "We call on the Cuban authorities to release Reverend Carballeda immediately and to clarify the reasons for his arrest and imprisonment. We are concerned that a church leader could be arrested and held for an entire month without charge, and urge the European Union and the United States to raise his case in their ongoing dialogues with the Cuban government. We continue to call on the Cuban government to bring legal matters related to religious activities and groups under regular legal mechanisms and remove the Office of Religious Affairs from its position of authority over all religious groups and activities. We urge the government to cease its harassment of all religious groups, registered and unregistered, and to allow religious groups who wish to register and to operate legally to do so."