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CUBA | Pastor Continues to Fight Property Expropriation

Two years after government orchestrated mobs to target his home, Rev. Yiorvis Bravo is renewing his call to the Cuban government to recognize his ownership of the property, which also serves as the headquarters of his denomination.

Rev. Bravo Denis has been fighting for two years for his right to be recognized as the legal owner of his home, which also acts as the national headquarters of the Apostolic Movement, a Protestant denomination which the government refuses to register. He and his family face the threat of eviction at any time.

This week Rev. Bravo Denis told Christian Solidarity Worldwide that state security officers continue to harass his friends and members of the church because of their connection to him, while his family has expressed concern at recent unexplained damage to the front of the home.

“We have a lot of questions, but we simply continue to pray and declare words of favor for the entire situation. It is necessary to keep pressuring [the government] through the media and human rights institutions and continuing to knock at every door that we come to on our path,” he said.

Rev. Bravo Denis also continues to wait for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) to issue its findings with regard to a Request for Precautionary Measures filed May 21 on his behalf.

The law firm Poblete Tamargo, which represents Rev. Bravo Denis, told CSW they are concerned at the length of time the IAHRC is taking. “While our client's rights continue to be trampled by the communist government of Cuba, the Commission is taking an unusually long time reviewing this case. Our client hopes that the Commission, and other interested parties in Washington DC, will be a little more proactive,” said lawyer Jason Poblete.

On Sept. 18, 2013, Rev. Bravo Denis was summoned to appear before the Ministry of Justice in Camagüey with Rev. Gude Perez, where, after a 20-minute court hearing it was decided that despite all the legal notarized documents proving his ownership of the property, Rev. Bravo Denis and his family should be evicted and the government should take over ownership.

He has refused to leave the property despite government-organized 'acts of repudiation' targeting the home. This involved state security agents, police and members of paramilitary groups dressed as civilians surrounding the house for days, shouting insults and throwing rocks, eggs and other hard objects in an attempt to force them out.

While the government has not taken action to forcibly evict the family, government officials have

continued to insist to Rev. Bravo Denis that the government owns the property and he is considered to be a tenant. In June, he was prevented by the authorities from traveling outside Cuba to attend an event in Peru. In a letter to him, the government justified the travel ban by claiming that his refusal to acknowledge the government as rightful owner of his property and his failure to pay rent to the authorities has resulted in debts that prevent his leaving Cuba for any reason. The letter refers to his status as 'a permanent tenant of the state'.

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "We continue to be deeply concerned by the precarious situation in which Yiorvis and his family are living, in constant danger of eviction because of the Cuban government's stance. The Cuban authorities' attempts to force him to pay rent on his own property and their actions preventing him from travelling outside the country because of this 'unpaid rent' amounts to nothing more than extortion. We call on the Cuban government to restore his property rights and also urge the IAHRC to issue its findings as soon as possible. Action from the IAHCR is critical not just for Yiorvis and his family but for other churches and religious organizations across Cuba who are also facing government attempts to illegally expropriate their property in a similar manner."