



## Activists, human rights organizations and the families of persons deprived of liberty in Cuba collectively urge the IACHR to conduct an *in loco* visit to Cuba in order to understand the situation

- ***The work being done by these collective groups represents a beacon of hope for Cuba, and the entire region - IACHR***

**Thursday, October 21, 2021.**- A public hearing titled “Human rights situation in the context of the protest in Cuba” was held today 10/21, during which families, activists and human rights organizations urged the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to request that the Cuban government allow the IACHR to conduct an *in loco* visit to the country in order to verify the full extent of the situation of persons deprived of liberty.

The hearing took place during the 181st period of sessions, where more than twenty organizations participated, expressing their desire for the IACHR to initiate a dialogue between the Commission, the Cuban government and the participating organizations. Regretfully, the government did not participate in the hearing.

Sayli Navarro, a promoter of *Cuba Decide* (“Cuba Decides”) and a member of the Ladies in White, told the Commissioners about the detention she and her father suffered on July 11. Felix Navarro, 68, and president of the Party for Democracy “Pedro Luis Boitel,” has not been seen since, and has also contracted COVID in prison. Ms. Navarro also mentioned the cases of José Daniel Ferrer, the national coordinator of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU); Fernando González, Roilán Zárraga and José Pupo, members of UNPACU and promoters of *Cuba Decide*; Keilylli de la Mora and Rosa Jany Milo Espinosa, among others.

Laritza Diversent, the director of Cubalex, expounded that since July 11, Cubalex and the *Justicia 11J* Working Group have recorded the arrests of 1,130 people, 572 of whom remain deprived of their liberty and several of them having denounced acts of torture and ill-treatment. Diversent also highlighted the cases of vulnerable groups, such as young people, Afro-descendants, women, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Although these groups do not represent the majority of arrests, the type of repression committed against them has been disproportionate, causing an exemplary impact in their communities, particularly against those who belong to civil society groups perceived as critical of the government.

Diversent shared about aggressions committed against journalists while covering the protests in order to suppress the flow of information. Aggressions were registered against 18 journalists – five women and 13 men – from eight independent media outlets. Despite all being released, the



majority of them were subject to repeated unlawful house arrest. She also warned about the legal framework implemented by the government to limit freedom of expression in the digital space. After the July 11 protests, Decree-Law No. 35, which legalizes mass interruption in internet access and imposes an obligation on operators and public telecommunications service providers to monitor Internet content, was imposed. Under this regulation, live transmission of demonstrations or online calls for protests can be qualified as harmful dissemination, cyberterrorism, cyberwar, and social subversion, according to Diversent.

Representing the Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration (CIR) was Osvaldo Navarro Velóz, who shared that the organization had been following arrests against artists in the context of the July 11 protests and the ill treatment of members of his organization by the government "in an attempt to dismiss the many demands of the most marginalized sectors of Cuban society." As such, he urged that "the support of the entire Inter-American System is vital."

Michel Matos, a member of the San Isidro Movement – an organization founded in 2018 with the mission of ensuring and safeguarding the cultural rights and human rights of citizens in Cuba – recounted the information that civil society organizations have documented since July 11. At least 39 arbitrary detentions against artists related to protests; abusive use of pre-trial detention either in prisons or in homes; confiscation of work materials; restrictions to leave the country; systematic cuts in communications; and denial of access to essential services such as health or housing.

Finally, Marthadela Tamayo González, a member of CIR and representative of the Council for the Democratic Transition of Cuba (CTDC), denounced that violence against women and their bodies represents only one aspect of systematic cruelty. She referred in particular to the cases of sisters María Cristina and Angélica Garrido Rodríguez, both human rights activists, who were violently arrested by six police officers on July 12 in their homes. Both are mothers and are awaiting trial on charges of alleged contempt, assault and resistance, and for participating in the protest at their place of residence.

The IACHR's response – led by Commissioner Edgar Stuardo Ralón Orellana, who is the Country Rapporteur – recognized the efforts and courage for the work carried out by organizations in such adverse conditions. Importantly, he also emphasized that the economic embargo should not be argued as the cause for situations that constitute violations of the main freedoms, liberties and human rights. These violations have another cause – "There is no freedom or a democratic government. Until this situation is resolved, it will be very difficult to be able to move forward guaranteeing human rights."

"We are concerned about violations of due process and disproportionate sentences whose sole objective is to discourage the right to protest and freedoms. The IACHR reiterates its commitment to continue making the situation in Cuba more visible."



Julissa Mantilla Falcón, first vice president of the IACHR, reiterated the Commission's commitment to continue monitoring and supporting the work that the organizations are doing, as it represents a hope not only for Cuba but also for the region.

The Commissioners coincided in their concern for the threats emitted by the government in direct opposition for the upcoming announced protests for November 15, and that they will continue to monitor with special attention the situation during the coming weeks.

### **UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS**

International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights (Race and Equality)  
Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL)  
Civil Rights Defenders (CRD)  
Cubalex  
Consejo para la Transición Democrática en Cuba (CTDC)  
Movimiento San Isidro (MSI)  
Comité Ciudadanos por la Integración Racial (CIR)  
La Hora de Cuba International  
IFEX-ALC  
ARTICLE 19 México & Central America  
Fundación para la Democracia Panamericana (FDP)  
Red Latinoamericana de Jóvenes por la Democracia (Juventud LAC)  
Centro de Acción y Defensa por los Derechos Humanos (CADEF)  
Impulsa Latinoamérica (IL)  
Civil Rights Defenders (CRD)  
Unión Patriótica de Cuba (UNPACU)  
Instituto Patmos (IP)