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Miami, FL

Testimony Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez"

My name is Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez", I am a former Cuban political prisoner, who had to pay a very high human cost in my country for having dared to peacefully raise my voice in favor of peaceful democratic change for which I had to remain for more than 17 years in prison enduring the cruelest of mistreatment and outrages.

I had committed the most serious crimes, being a black opponent in a communist country. But today I do not come to talk about my experience, which is already past; but about a very current and latent experience and it is about my maternal brother and religious leader Loreto Hernandez Garcia and his wife Donaida Perez Paseiro who are imprisoned in Cuba punished to 7 and 8 years of imprisonment for the only crime of daring to go out peacefully to the streets on July 11, 2021, to demand freedom and rights for the Cubans.

My brother Loreto and his wife Donaida are priests of the Yoruba religion and vice president and president respectively of the "Asociación Yorubas Libres de Cuba" a religious entity founded in the center of the country with the purpose of being able to practice the religion outside the control and tutelage of the ruling regime, as well as to protect the religious rights and freedoms, not only of the Yorubas, but of the other religions in the country.

Since the organization was founded, the most refined and cruel repression has been directed against them, police summons, harassment, threats to members not to visit the house temple, searches, and public humiliations.

The children of its members are permanently harassed in schools and pressured to renounce their religion and their religious attire. As well as the godchildren and members of the organization; one of them was pressured to commit suicide as was the case of the young Yaimara Reyes Mesa who, unable to bear the constant persecution and threats against her and her family, took her own life by setting herself on fire. The case and end of Reyes Mesa clearly express what these communist regimes, enemies of law and freedom, are capable of.

In addition to Loreto and Donaida, two other members of the association are imprisoned, the sisters Lisdany and Lisdany Rodriguez Isaac, to a sentence of 8 years in prison for their participation in the 11j, against whom a very refined methodology of pressure is applied, which consists of proposing them reduced sentences and the possibility of improvements in exchange

for the public renunciation of their religious ideas. Prison for them is doubly cruel and difficult since they are subjected to countless mistreatments and humiliations to break their religious faith and make them renounce it.

They have been victims before and after their unjust imprisonment. Since the founding of the Free Yoruba Association of Cuba, the home or temple of Hernández García and Pérez Paseiro's organization has been the victim of siege, surveillance, and fierce persecution. The godchildren and members of the organization are subjected to constant threats and summons to desist from continuing to practice this religion because they could be imprisoned.

The former president of the organization, priest Jonniel Rodríguez Riverol, was intercepted when he was trying to travel to Havana where he would take a flight to Brazil, invited to participate in an international religious event, and was subjected to a brutal beating that left him with sequelae for the rest of his life. Most of the members of the organization are included in the so-called "regulated" list, a category applied by the Cuban regime to those who are prevented from traveling abroad and thus unable to participate in international events or to travel abroad to meet or share with religious brothers and sisters who invite them.

The young priest Dairon Hernández Pérez, son of the current political prisoners Loreto Hernández and Donaida Pérez Paseiro, has been the victim of intense and fierce persecution and harassment to force him into compulsory military service. The same young man was the victim of such a merciless beating that he was left unconscious on the pavement and still has visible traces of the blows on his body.

The same day that Loreto Hernández García was imprisoned for his participation in the protests of June 11, the state security officers told him emphatically, we are going to see if your saints and your religion are going to get you out of prison. We are going to eliminate you for being a black santero and counterrevolutionary.

Days later and when he suffered a pre-heart attack and when he heard from the doctor that his health is incompatible with the penitentiary regime on his return to his cell the officer told Loreto, look black we do not care about the doctor's criteria, if as he says your health is not compatible with the prison regime better for us so you die and we have one less meal to give.

Being in prison and in the preparatory phase for the oral hearing the political police in coordination with the prosecutor brought a witness who under threats was to testify against Loreto something that by conscience he refused to do in front of the court.

He arrived at his cell and shouted in a provocative tone, I do not believe in opponents and much less in religious people, for us, the only religion is the revolution, and our only god is Fidel, to which Loreto responded: If you don't believe in opponents, I don't believe in communists either and if your only religion is the revolution and your god is Fidel my religion is Yoruba and my god is Oggún, saying this he was handcuffed behind his back and dragged through the corridors while he was beaten by several soldiers and then thrown down some stairs.

Donaida Perez Paseiros is subjected to all kinds of repression, her religious pulse has been violently wrenched from her and she is frequently humiliated for her religious beliefs. Her posture provokes repression against her.

A few days ago, there was a protest in the prison by inmates who began to shout Homeland and Life, the military went to Loreto who was bedridden with fever and hypertension and without a word, they threw him out of his bed and beat him or took him to the punishment cells.

In my opinion, the most genuine expression of cruelty against him was when high officials of the political police told him that although the medical commission had approved his extra penal discharge, it could not be granted due to the interests of state security, that is to say, that due to the interests of the political police my brother, religious leader and political prisoner Loreto Hernandez Garcia is condemned to die in prison despite the fact that by oppressive medical criteria, his state of health is not compatible with the prison system.

The prohibition to receive adequate medical attention, delay, suspension and even adulteration of drugs is part of the daily repressive action of the medical corps of a prison that bends its criteria to the will of the military, it is a practice suffered by most of the prisoners and it was suffered by the Yoruba priest Loreto Hernandez Garcia when despite being in bad condition in the hospital ward he was expelled from there by order of the military despite not having a definite diagnosis. Similar treatment was received by his wife Donaida Perez who after contracting the covid 19 received only isolation and total uncommunication in a punishment cell.

General considerations.

To understand in depth the violations of religious freedom in Cuba and its magnitude, the lack of freedom, and the climate of harassment of religions in Cuba, we must first place ourselves in the context that Cuba has been living for more than 6 decades.

Cuba is an atheist and materialist system by essence, the enemy of God and of any faith, the victims and violations in this matter would be an endless chapter. Another thing is that the dictatorial and totalitarian character of the Cuban dictatorship makes it impossible for any type of religious organization, no matter how moderate it may seem, to exercise its worship, since the phrase "within the revolution everything, outside the revolution nothing" is more than indicative of that hegemonic power that controls and represses everything and considers as an enemy anyone who tries to do so independently.

For this reason, the priests, both Christian and Yoruba, the Christian pastor whatever his denomination, the Muslims, in short, any practitioner who submits to do it outside the state control is considered its enemy power.

The youth of my generation will never forget phrases like religion is the opium of the people or that religion is the fifth column of the counterrevolution. This anti-Christian hatred, this terror of everything that does not have Fidel Castro as God, and this distrust of any form of grouping outside of the regime's control, triggers the regime's flames and instigates repression.

Now what can the international community do? what can events like these do?

Contribute to the visualization of reality so adulterated and manipulated for decades. Launch an international campaign that contributes to visualizing the faces of repression, and their cases with weighty arguments.

That the academic and diplomatic world stop looking at Cuba as a panacea of social justice and equity.

Let Cuba begin to be seen for what it is; a laboratory of repression, racism, and discrimination where the commissars enjoy the most open impunity.

We, the victims of repression, are infinitely hurt by the naive criteria of our friends who, echoing the propaganda machinery of the sinister intelligence bodies of the regime, may believe that their support and pronouncements can harm those who suffer.

It hurts and worries us as our friends and sympathizers cannot realize how much we need, and we demand solidarity from the free and democratic world.

The most nourishing thing for a political prisoner and a victim of repression in any part of the world is to know solidarity.

I conclude my speech by appealing to the conscience of each one of you and invite you not to be silent and not to faint in your cries, that the victims of repression in my country need you to shout and cry out for them and the louder you shout and the more times you do it, the more protection they will have.

God bless you all.

Thank you very much.