

Alayn Toledano Valiente

Public Hearing on Religious Freedom in Cuba

Greetings, my name is Alayn Toledano Valiente, I was born and raised in the city of Santiago de Cuba in a family practicing the Yoruba religion and I converted to Jesus Christ at the age of 21 on October 5, 1993, in an Assemblies of God church, where I was president of the youth and belonged to the national board for 9 years. My wife and I were called to serve God full-time in 1999 and founded the Emanuel church in Santiago de Cuba, which we pastored for 23 years. In all these years of work, we raised up forty-one churches on the island that are still functioning today thanks to God, of which we are His apostles.

The Cuban regime tries to absorb everyone on the island so that they become an instrument of its repressive machinery, offering anything in exchange for serving it. Not being in communion with its ideology nor giving in to its offer is enough to become a military objective. It is here when the agonizing journey of a life sentence by an oppressive regime that enslaves, terrorizes, and tries to reduce its opponents to nothing begins.

The island's regime punishes institutions, ministries, or believers who do not accept its ideology by taking away all their rights, not allowing them to hold any job, and being disqualified wherever they go by order of the military in charge of the operation. Their children are harassed in schools, publicly shamed, and beaten, like my daughters Elisama and Berenice, who were beaten and abused by teachers and threatened to be sent to behavioral schools (Prisoners).

All the agencies of the system are activated in a repressive program against believers, institutions, churches, etc., they charge electricity at exorbitant prices, they prevent them from building meeting places, and houses, and if some already have permission, they work to cancel it in order to provoke a general crisis to ruin their lives and functions. Since they took power, they suspended the right of new organizations to register and have all legal rights, thus taking away the right to operate freely, building a state of illegality and clandestinely in their functions.

Those who do not serve the interests of the Cuban regime suffer the punishment of being regulated, thus preventing them from enjoying the right of freedom to leave and enter the country, they are even regulated nationally, preventing them from

entering cities in the same country, and to make matters worse, many even today suffer the abuse of not being able to leave their own homes, thus giving them their house for prison, because of the idea that the streets of Cuba belong to Fidel, that is, to the system, therefore whoever does not join their gangs has no right to walk freely in the streets of a neighborhood or the country.

If this first phase does not break you, then they move on to a second phase, the confiscation of your belongings, under laws imposed and fabricated to repress the Cuban people, the military leaders launch the agencies to apply manipulative laws to take away your house, your land, your animals, even your children, they demolish your property many times to create terror among Cubans and exhibit it to give a public lesson and thus subject to fear all those who oppose them or try to do so.

After all this comes a more dangerous phase, the fabrication of crimes to criminalize you and take away your freedom, imprison you, and then inside activate aggressors who, often pretending to be prisoners, are undercover agents at the order of the system to settle accounts with those disaffected with the regime. The life of any Cuban is in danger, we see how gangs assault the homes of many worthy people who have not lent themselves to the diabolical game of enslaving the Cuban people, their homes are assaulted and beaten inside their own dwellings with any type of weapon, the police shoot at people who claim their rights, kill, abuse and enjoy impunity, backed by criminal laws that justify killing you for the ill-named revolution.

Many of the examples I have mentioned today are not stories heard or invented, we have lived them in our own flesh, living up to five arrests in less than a week for a harassment plan to destabilize my life, my family, and the church. I have been the victim of countless interrogations prolonged for hours, locked in places with climate at its maximum power all day, without water, not physically protected, without food, and isolated. Today, sadly my whole family is physically and psychologically affected thanks to Castroism and its repressive actions.

Twice we have been evicted from our homes and thrown into the street, in 2007 and in 2016, our houses, material goods, and all our technological devices have been seized by the Cuban regime, our lands forcibly expropriated, our temples demolished, our animals distributed to whomever the military wished at their will. No mortal can recover from a repressive wave like this, the traumas caused to our children, our partners, to the church of Christ are irreversible. My daughters and wife still jump asleep in their beds, they wake up with the high blood pressure many

times, being alive by the mercy of God.

Life begins to be in danger, the threat of death is already blatantly announced, beginning a cycle of accidents, assaults, acts of repudiation, repressive waves of all kinds, vandals storming your house, surprising aggressions, etc. Freedom is ending, peace, law, everything is dying because of the machinery of death that is imposed on the island to preserve in power the tribe that has kidnapped it.

EXILE, at will or in most cases forced, the real name is exile, in many of the cases they never set foot on their land again, leaving their entire family there, parents, partners, children, and siblings who often stop seeing them for years and in the worst cases, never again. On July 24, 2022, together with my wife and my two youngest daughters I had to leave the island of Cuba, everything around me suffered the scourge of the dictatorship that gave me thirty days to leave the country, where I never longed to leave.

Left behind were my two eldest daughters, four grandchildren, my mother, and my brothers, thirty-six (36) churches, and thousands of leaders and disciples who in less than 24 hours did not see us again, we could not even say goodbye. My eldest daughter suffers from breast cancer, she cries daily, she suffers, but I cannot be by her side thanks to the Cuban regime. No one deserves to flee from their country and their family to find peace and freedom, for this reason, today we denounce the crimes of Castroism against humanity and we ask for justice and freedom for the Cuban people, those inside and those of us outside the Island, Homeland and Life.

America is the guardian of the elementary rights of humans on earth, which is why it is time for the relationship with Cuba to be based on principles that help Cubans to have a fair life, for which I propose the Biden administration.

1- Demand that the Havana regime stop repressing and imprisoning its citizens for making use of their free expression, stop persecution, imprisonment and all kinds of punishment of Cubans for not being communists and expose their criteria regarding the government prevailing.

2- That it shows with evidence to the world the end of poverty and hunger of the Cuban people, giving each citizen the power to develop their full potential by working and opening their own businesses, guaranteeing Cuba a rule of law for Cubans and not for the communist party.

3- Any Cuban citizen who is imprisoned or under a sanction for expressing his discontent towards the regime demanding his rights is immediately released.

4- Establish a fair process in Havana to change the constitution of the Republic of Cuba so that it guarantees life, peace and the well-being of the Cuban people and not of the communist party.

5- A transition process to be opened to establish a government and a democratic system where the Cuban people can live freely and democratically elect the leaders to lead the Cuban nation.

Pastor: Alain Toledano

Pathways to Justice Ministry