



27 October 2023

His Excellency Miguel Díaz-Canel
President of the Republic of Cuba
Office of the President Havana, Cuba

Dear President Díaz-Canel,

We write to you as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds committed to promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief for all. The International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) comprises an extensive network of over 300 parliamentarians, representing 90 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, and Oceania.

On 10 October 2023, the UN General Assembly re-elected Cuba as one of the 15 new Member States of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2024-2026 term. This appointment reflects the international community's trust in Cuba's commitment to advancing human rights nationally, regionally, and globally. Countries chosen for the Human Rights Council (HRC) are expected to showcase their dedication to the human rights standards, encompassing their complete cooperation with all United Nations mechanisms.

Cuba's membership in the Human Rights Council presents a valuable opportunity to affirm its dedication to upholding, protecting, and promoting freedom of religion or belief, which is an integral part of the human rights framework. We are writing to underscore the importance of preserving and advancing the principles of this fundamental human right.

While recognizing Cuba's progress in various aspects of human rights implementation, we remain concerned about persistent violations of freedom of religion or belief within the country. As a member of the Human Rights Council, we sincerely hope that Cuba will take concrete steps to address these concerns and work towards fully realizing the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone everywhere.



In a letter we sent to His Excellency Miguel Díaz-Canel, President of the Republic of Cuba, in 2020, we already delineated several points of concern:

- **2019 Cuban Constitution:** Specific provisions have diminished safeguarding the right to freedom of religion or belief, mainly removing the term "freedom of conscience." While the recent adoption of the new Cuban constitution presented an opportunity for the government to involve Cuban citizens in this process, there have been reports of difficulties throughout.
- **Reform of the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA):** Our concern revolves around the ORA, as an entity operating under the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, which wields direct control over religious groups and their activities. The ORA operates without being subject to external accountability, solely answering to the Party. This leads to arbitrary interference with the religious groups' right to practice their faith freely.
- **Detention of Religious Leaders:** Reports have emerged regarding the detention and restrictions on religious leaders exercising their spiritual duties. We have also received information indicating that religious leaders faced harassment for their participation in the constitutional process, raising concerns about the legitimacy of the reforms.

We request that Cuba consider these issues seriously and take measures to ensure that freedom of religion or belief is upheld and protected for all its citizens. By doing so, Cuba can further strengthen its commitment to human rights and contribute positively to the work of the Human Rights Council. Such restrictions on fundamental human rights being perpetrated by members of the HRC undermine the credibility of the Council as a whole.

We, the Steering Group of IPPFoRB, are willing to engage in a constructive dialogue on this matter and are open to collaborating with Cuban authorities to find solutions that respect the rights and freedoms of all Cuban citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We welcome any discussions on improving freedom of religion or belief in Cuba.



International Panel of
Parliamentarians
for Freedom of Religion
or Belief

Sincerely,

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MP Norway
Chair of IPPFoRB Steering Group

Hon Nqabayomzi Kwankwa
MP South Africa
Vice Chair of IPPFoRB Steering Group
Chair of AfriPAHR Steering Group

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