



International Panel of
Parliamentarians
for Freedom of Religion
or Belief

21 April 2020

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 the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief for all. We write to raise ongoing concerns and to offer recommendations to ensure that the freedom of religion or belief is fully respected in Cuba.

We urge you to seize this moment to advance human rights in line with international standards. International organizations such as ours are ready to support Cuba and its people. We recommend that your government ensures that the implementation of the new constitution fully supports freedom of religion or belief. We are concerned that several provisions weakened protection of this fundamental right, including the removal of the term “freedom of conscience.” We urge you to consider amending problematic provisions to ensure the full protection of this fundamental right. The recent passage of the new Cuban constitution gave an opportunity for the government to engage Cuban citizens in this process. However, several reports comment that the process was not without troubles. We have learnt that religious leaders were harassed in response to their engagement in the constitutional process, which brings into question the legitimacy of the reforms.

We also suggest that the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) be reformed. We are concerned that the ORA, as an entity of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, maintains direct authority over religious groups and activities and is only accountable to the Party. The ORA arbitrarily interferes with religious groups’ right to practice their religion. We encourage your government to review the procedures for religious groups to register and ensure that these procedures do not result in arbitrary or politically motivated decisions. Further, the ORA and local community officials must cease its meddling in religious practice. Members of religious organizations, whether registered or unregistered, must be allowed to openly and freely worship and practice their faith in a community. We also encourage you to freely allow the construction, renovation, and repairing of buildings so that religious communities can have and maintain dignified places of worship. We urge the repeal of the law regulating house churches to allow all to worship in their communities without excessive interference by state authorities.



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We have heard reports that after the launch of the public consultations on the constitution state security agents surveilled, visited, blocked from traveling, and threatened pastors involved in calls for stronger religious freedom protections, and arrested several religious leaders. As part of this harassment campaign, Pastor Ramón Rigal and his wife were sentenced to prison in April 2019 for refusing to send their children to government-run schools due to their religious beliefs and concern about Cuban schools' promotion of socialism and atheism. We urge your security services to immediately release all religious prisoners of conscience and end the practice of harassing and arresting Cuban religious leaders.

Further, we would like to draw attention to the treatment of prodemocracy and human rights activists who are denied their right to freedom of religion or belief. The Ladies in White and other activists are frequently detained on their way to religious services, beaten, and held without charge, sometimes for more than 24 hours. We encourage you to freely allow these activists to attend religious services and release any activists currently in custody.

Consistently, international organizations around the world emphasize the need for reform of religious freedom and related rights in Cuba. Cubans of all faiths and no faith deserve the right to live in accordance with their conscience. We respectfully urge you to take concrete actions now to provide freedom of religion or belief to all in Cuba.

Thank you for taking our recommendations into consideration. We welcome any discussions on improving the freedom of religion or belief in Cuba.

Sincerely,

The following parliamentarians support this letter in their personal capacity and not as a representative of their government, political party, or any other body.

NAME	COUNTRY	CURRENT/FORMER MP
Bushra Butt	Pakistan	Current Parliamentarian
Russ Hiebert	Canada	Former Parliamentarian
Honoré NGAM	Cameroon	Current Parliamentarian
Hon. Lamin j Sanneh	The Gambia	Current Parliamentarian
Hon Amadou Camara	The Gambia	Current Parliamentarian



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Khadija Elatri	Morocco	Current Parliamentarian
Jude Njomo	Kenya	Current Parliamentarian
Abel Pires da Silva	Timor-Leste	Current Parliamentarian
Ejaz Augustine	Pakistan	Current Parliamentarian
Fernanda San Martin Carrasco	Bolivia	Current Parliamentarian
Dritan Abazovic	Montenegro	Current Parliamentarian
Honoré NGAM	Cameroon	Current Parliamentarian
Angel Alvarado	Venezuela	Current Parliamentarian
Andrei Pop	Romania	Current Parliamentarian
Jamshed Thomas	Pakistan	Current Parliamentarian
Hon Muhammed Ndow	The Gambia	Current Parliamentarian
Cathay Wagantall	Canada	Current Parliamentarian