

Free Cuba Foundation Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba 44th session of the UPR Working Group, October - November 2023

Introduction

1. The Cuban government does not recognize the legality of independent reporting on the socio-economic challenges facing the island. Activists protesting the deteriorating housing situation in Cuba have been punished.
2. The government does not provide data on the number of homeless Cubans on the island.
3. **The right of access to adequate housing, food, and healthcare. These are the most basic rights needed to guarantee a decent and dignified life and are increasingly being eroded in Cuba.**

Demanding adequate housing in Cuba is a punishable offense.

4. Cuban human rights defender **Silverio Portal Contreras** was sentenced to four years in prison for alleged crimes of "public disorder" and "contempt" after leading several public protests demanding decent housing for all Cubans. He was detained on June 20, 2016 in Havana and the court document states that "the behavior of the accused is particularly offensive because it took place in a touristic area." (1) The document further describes the accused as having "bad social and moral behavior" and mentions that he fails to participate in pro-government activities.
5. According to Silverio's wife, before his arrest he had campaigned against the collapse of dilapidated buildings in Havana. Silverio was recognized as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International on August 26, 2019. (2) He was beaten by prison officials in mid-May 2020 and lost sight in one eye, and spent 2 years and 9 months unjustly imprisoned. (3) He suffered a stroke during his imprisonment and is now in fragile health. (4)
6. Government officials, who jailed Silverio, did not heed his warnings regarding dilapidated buildings. On January 27, 2020 three school girls died when a balcony collapsed on them in Old Havana. **María Karla Fuentes** and **Lisnavy Valdés Rodríguez**, both 12 years old, and **Rocío García Nápoles**, 11 years old were killed. (5)
7. Although buildings housing Cubans are in disrepair and collapsing the Cuban government is in the midst of a construction boom, for luxury tourist hotels. (6),(7)
8. Cuban policy makers decided not to invest in Cuba's maintenance of their power plants in favor of plowing hundreds of millions of dollars into building luxury hotels across the country that profit GAESA, the Cuban military conglomerate run by the Cuban military. Funds used for some of the more high profile hotel construction projects could have met the needs for the upkeep of Cuba's national electric grid, and power plants.(8)

Recommendations

- **Respect and recognize the right to freedom of expression and association.**
- **Recognize independent civil society organizations.**
- **Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.**
- **Ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.**
- **Prioritize public housing for homeless Cubans over building luxury hotels.**

Endnotes

(1) Amnesty International "Cuba: Panorama de los presos y presas de conciencia bajo el gobierno del presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel" Agosto 27, 2019 Index Number: AMR 25/0936/2019
<https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr25/0936/2019/es/>

(2) CubaBrief: Amnesty International names five new prisoners of conscience August 27, 2019
<https://www.cubacenter.org/archives/2019/8/27/cubabrief-amnesty-international-names-five-new-prisoners-of-conscience>

(3) Marti Noticias "Preso político Silverio Portal pierde visión de un ojo tras golpiza, informa su esposa" May 27, 2020
<https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/preso-pol%C3%ADtico-silverio-portal-pierde-visualizaci%C3%B3n-de-un-ojo-tras-golpiza-informa-su-esposa/265886.html>

(4) Diario de Cuba "Silverio Portal tras salir de prisión: Conmigo hubo 'una discriminación racial y abuso de poder'" December 4, 2020
https://diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1607076252_26969.html

(5) On Cuba "Three girls die in Old Havana due to collapse of a balcony" January 28, 2020
<https://oncubanews.com/en/cuba/three-girls-die-in-old-havana-due-to-collapse-of-a-balcony/>

(6) Associated Press "Cuban economic boom a boon to the military" by Andrea Rodriguez September 9, 2016
<https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/special/2016/09/10/cuban-economic-boom-boon-to-military/25477886007/>

(7) NPR "Cuba hopes if it builds new hotels, tourists will come, after a long COVID shutdown" May 24, 2022 <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/22/1100587966/tourists-are-returning-to-cuba-but-is-it-enough-for-the-islands-economy>

(8) 14ymedio "'There Is No Money' to Repair Thermoelectric Plants in Cuba, But There is Money to Invest in Luxury Hotels" August 27, 2022
<https://translatingcuba.com/there-is-no-money-to-repair-thermoelectric-plants-in-cuba-but-there-is-money-to-invest-in-luxury-hotels/>