

39th Session of the Human Rights Council

Agenda Item 6, UPR Outcomes: Cuba

Organisation: Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Speaker: Claire Denman

**CSW everyone
free to believe**

Thank you Mr President,

Despite accepting recommendations relating to freedom of religion or belief during its previous UPR reviews, CSW has reported a steady rise in the number of FoRB violations in Cuba.

We note with regret the lack of recommendations made by States regarding the right to freedom of religion or belief during the most recent review.

As we speak, a citizens' consultation of a new, government-proposed draft constitution is underway. While Article 15 of this constitution nominally guarantees freedom of religion or belief, it does not extend to freedom of conscience and fails to guarantee the rights of individuals and institutions to manifest their faith or non-faith either in public or in private. The new wording of this constitution represents a significant step backwards.

The government of Cuba continues to use a range of measures to impede the right to FoRB on the island. Arbitrary detention of religious leaders and human rights defenders remains a common tactic. Every week for the past decade dozens of women affiliated with the Ladies in White movement, a nonviolent independent civil society group, have been systematically detained and prevented from participating in religious activities. The Ladies in White suspended their campaign between 27 May and 1 July 2018 due to the pressure from the government on their movement.

We call on the government of Cuba to cease the harassment of religious leaders and human rights defenders.

In a number of cases Cuban FoRB defenders have sought asylum in other Caribbean countries, due to the serious harassment and threats they have received from Cuban State Security. Some of these individuals have been granted UNHCR refugee status, however, they live in precarious conditions – without the right to work, access public services such as education and are often victims of xenophobia.

We further call on Cuba to act on the recommendations of many States by fully ratifying both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including optional protocols, and to adopt these principles into domestic law.

Finally, CSW urges the government of Cuba to issue a standing invitation to the UN Special Procedures, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Thank you