



August 19, 2019

Secretary Mike Pompeo
U.S. State Department
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

SUBJECT: *Cuba; Violations of Religious Liberty & Other Fundamental Rights*

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

Thank you for your leadership defending people of faith around the globe. During the ministerial last month, you called attention to the plight of people of faith in Cuba and reminded participants how several Cuban Evangelical leaders and other religious leaders were prohibited from traveling to Washington, D.C. for the event. The faith leaders you mentioned in your remarks included representatives of the *Alianza de Iglesias Evangélicas de Cuba*, a coalition recently formed by the largest Evangelical churches in Cuba to advocate for common goals, including religious freedom.

The Communist Party's religion police or Office of Religious Affairs ("ORA") is responsible for making it harder for people of faith to exercise their fundamental rights. They engage in tactics used by other repressive systems such as the East German Stasi. For years the ORA has engaged in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom of people of faith. We strongly urge the U.S. government to consider adding to the Specially Designated Nationals list the following Cuban nationals who direct and manage ORA: Ms. Caridad del Rosario Diego Bello, Ms. Sonia Garcia Garcia, Mr. Rober Noa Frometa, among others.

According to the State Department's Cuba 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, the Cuban Communist Party, through the ORA and the Cuban Ministry of Justice ("MOJ") continue to control all aspects of religious life. The ORA, with the complicity of the MOJ and other organizations, is directly responsible for a majority of the Cuban government's violations of religious liberty. The ORA is responsible for systematic violations denounced by the



undersigned organizations and documented and reported by the USCIRF, as well as the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report on Cuba.

Under the ORA's direction, the government has continued to restrict domestic and international travel, detain, and, if necessary, use violence against religious leaders and their followers. The ORA event restricts the rights of prisoners to practice religion freely. The ORA and other entities of the Communist Party harasses or detains members of religious groups advocating for greater religious and political freedom, including the *Ladies in White*, the *Patmos Institute*, among others.

In order to impede groups to practice their religion, the Communist Party's ORA and MOJ have conspired and used the color of law to deny religious groups a discriminatory "official registration" in order to worship. The ORA fails to respond to long-pending applications from Apostolic groups, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, among many others.

Earlier this year in a high-profile case in Guantanamo, Cuba, the MOJ prosecuted and imprisoned the family of Ramon Rigal and Ayda Exposito for practicing homeschooling and educating their children according to their conscience. There are reports of other families suffering persecution for the same reasons. The attorney who bravely attempted to defend the Rigal family was beaten, tried, and sentenced to a year in prison -- a common occurrence in Cuba because the lawyers who defend fundamental rights cases do so at great risk.

As it has been for decades, the Cuban Catholic Church is also under threat from the ORA and its leaders. A few weeks ago, the ORA canceled public celebrations of the "Jornada Nacional de la Juventud Católica en Cuba", while all preparations and permits were previously granted. Catholic Priest Jorge Luis Perez said: "*We received official communication from the ORA, that public celebrations would not be authorized in any diocese of the country except in the archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba.*" In addition, the regime prohibited Catholic lay leaders from attending the funeral services for Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, who died last month.

Because of the systemic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom and other fundamental rights, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the U.S. government to



impose economic sanctions¹ and restrict U.S. visas² to persons who work for the ORA and the Cuban Ministry of Justice. Moreover, these restrictions should also extend to any individual or organization, no matter where they are located, who supports the ORA and the Cuban Ministry of Justice.

We respectfully urge the U.S. government, especially the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Unit (“HRVWCU”) of the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to investigate the entry into the United States of persons who may have been affiliated with these Cuban entities that operate with impunity in Cuba. The ORA and related entities in Cuba also try to spread Cuba's state policy on religion to other nations throughout the Western Hemisphere posing a threat to regional stability in places such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, and other nations.

Thank you for your leadership on religious liberty and other fundamental rights. We are available to assist as needed.

Sincerely,

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¹ 50 U.S.C. App. §§ 5 and 16; Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, 22 U.S.C. §§ 6001-6010; Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, 22 U.S.C. §§ 6021-6091; Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, 22 U.S.C. §§ 2656; the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. §§ 1701-1706, and other U.S. laws and regulations.

² Immigration and Nationality Act, §§ 212(a)(2)(G), 212(a)(3)(E)(ii), 212(a)(3)(E)(iii), et seq., and other U.S. laws and regulations.