



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Deteriorating Religious Freedom Conditions in Cuba

Wednesday June 18, 2023

10:30 AM-12:00PM ET

American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora

Fred Davie, USCIRF Vice Chair

Good morning and thank you for attending the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing on Deteriorating Religious Freedom Conditions in Cuba. I would like to thank our distinguished witnesses and all our in-person and online attendees for joining us for this important discussion. And thank you to the American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora for providing this great venue for us.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. The Commission uses international standards to monitor freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy

recommendations to the U.S. government. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this important hearing.

One of our long-standing recommendations is that the U.S. government would encourage Cuban authorities to extend an official invitation to USCIRF for unrestricted visits. In lieu of such an invitation, we chose to bring this hearing to Miami. Traveling here presented a remarkable opportunity for USCIRF to speak directly with Cubans and members of the Cuban diaspora about the increasingly repressive situation that Cuba's religious communities face.

USCIRF has included Cuba in its Annual Report each year since 2004. In our 2023 Annual Report, we document the Cuban government's systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom in 2022, and for the first time, recommended the State Department designate Cuba as a Country of Particular Concern, or CPC, which the State Department also did for the first time in November 2022.

Unfortunately, religious freedom conditions in Cuba continue to worsen. The Cuban government tightly controls religious activity through surveillance,

harassment of religious leaders and laypeople, forced exile, fines, and ill treatment of religious prisoners of conscience. Religious leaders and groups that are unregistered or conduct unsanctioned religious activity—as well as journalists reporting on religious freedom conditions—face relentless oppression from the Office of Religious Affairs, or ORA, and state security forces.

I will now turn the floor over to Commissioner Frank Wolf to share some concerning religious freedom trends USCIRF is tracking in Cuba.