

WRITTEN STATEMENT

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- Title and organizational affiliation: Founder Cuba Decide initiative.
- Name of the Subcommittee: Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy.
- Date of the hearing: Tuesday July 20, 2021
- Title of the hearing: Historic Protests in Cuba and the Crackdown on Free Expression

My name is Rosa María Payá, from the citizen initiative Cuba Decide, to promote democracy and Human Rights in Cuba. My father Oswaldo Payá was extrajudicially killed by agents of the regime in Cuba, on July 22nd, 2012. Secretary of State John Kerry released back then a statement, calling for an impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding the crime.

The Cuban people are in the streets, struggling for freedom. Only in July 11, we registered at least 45 cities and towns where Cubans took to the streets to protest, including all the major cities. With one demand and one demand alone: Freedom, the end of the dictatorship.

The regime has approved that the demonstrations be repressed. Diaz-Canel, designated by Castro to be the civil face of his military regime, called for a “war in the streets” to “fight using any means”.

In the eastern provinces, the police shot one peaceful protester in the head. It’s on video. The name of the victim is unknown.

Daniel Joel Cárdenas Díaz was also shot, inside his home on Velásquez Street, in Cárdenas city. This was witnessed by neighbors and his wife, Marbelis Vázquez. It’s on video. He is hospitalized and will be charged.

Videos show people arriving at hospitals, badly hurt by police beatings and bullets. Shot in the arm, in the leg, in the stomach, in the back. Hospitals report them to the police, and many are now missing.

The victims are mainly young workers and students, not from the organized dissidence. Contrary to what the regime claims, they do not receive support from other governments. Many are people of color, from the poorest sectors of society. As today, we have documented at least 532 detained and/or missing persons. We estimate that the actual number of detainees or disappeared is in the thousands and there is evidence of minors who have been violently arrested. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic is now at its worst in Cuba, as a result of the authorities encouraging tourism, and refusing to accept support from international vaccination efforts.

Young people who are passing compulsory military service are being forced to repress the protests. In addition, there is an active effort by the

authorities visiting houses and obligatory recruiting young people from the age of 17. If they refuse, they can be prosecuted and detained for the crime of Disobedience.

The police, state security apparatus, other members of the Ministry of the Interior forces, and the elite troops of the Armed Forces (FAR), often times dressed in civilian clothes, attacked protesters in the streets and also inside their houses using extreme force, sometimes lethal, causing deaths and injuries. The Generals Raul Castro and Luis Alberto Rodriguez Lopez Callejas, Miguel Diaz-Canel and the ministers of the Interior and the Armed Forces (Generals Lázaro Alberto Álvarez Casas and Álvaro López Miera) among other top regime officials, are some of the well-known names at the command of these repressive bodies.

The dictatorship has the days numbered. The world is watching. In this context, to lift the sanctions against the Cuban or the Venezuelan regime, is to fund the Cuban repressors to keep hurting our people.

Our people know that to get out of the crisis we have to end the dictatorship, that's why despite the lack of food and medicines, the protesters are demanding freedom, human rights, and democracy. They were shouting: "freedom" "no more fear," "change is possible," and asking the dictators to leave. In many hours of video, none of them mentioned the U.S. embargo. They were chanting "Homeland and Life," alternatively to the Castros' slogan of "Homeland or Death."

To accept the migratory crisis blackmail of the Cuban regime, is to fail the Cuban people. Here we would like to humbly mention some policy proposals for the U.S. government to consider, to support the Cuban people.

- 1) Do not negotiate with the regime, no one is entitled to speak for the Cuban people, but please, elevate their voice that demands freedom. The President and Congress should make no unilateral concessions, but ask for irreversible steps that should include: the unconditional release of all political prisoners; the end of repression; respect in law and in practice of freedom of expression, association—including independent political parties—, public assembly and economic freedom.

- 2) Empower the citizens, as suggested by president Biden, the U.S. should provide an independent internet access to the Cuban people out of regime control.
- 3) Impose political, financial and all kinds of targeted sanctions—like the Global Magnitsky Act—upon individuals of the Cuban regime involved in human rights abuses. All democratic mechanisms applied should ensure that the regime respects the people’s call for a peaceful transition to democracy.
- 4) Apply the Sullivan Principles, before investing in Cuba, companies should commit to support human rights, equal opportunities, fair competition, and respect for intellectual and property rights on the Island.
- 5) Be leaders of solidarity. Invite the sister Republics of our hemisphere and the European Union to take similar steps to support the people in Cuba. Implement a comprehensive strategy for peace and freedom in Cuba today, using the tools of the Inter-American system, including the Interamerican Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance with the help of the OAS. The appeasement of a regime that actively interferes to undermine regional democracies in the Americas, will only lead to less stability in our region. Cuban regime should continue to be excluded from the Summit of the Americas, until the regime complies with the Inter-American Democratic Charter.
- 6) Protect the civilians in Cuba from the brutal repression. The United States and the world must use the language of force against a regime that has all the power and is using force against pacific and unarmed people. All options within international law must be on the table to protect the lives of the people.

Thank you for listening. God bless Cuba in this hour of freedom. And God bless the United States of America.