

Written Statement
By Sirley Avila Leon, Human Rights Activist
For the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International
Organizations
on the occasion of the upcoming hearing on
July 13, 2016: The Castro Regime's Ongoing Violations of Civil and Political Rights
Text translated by John Suarez

My name is Sirley Avila Leon, I'm Cuban and I live in Cuba. Since 2005 because of my work as a delegate to the Municipal Assembly of People's Power for the Majibacoa municipality I saw the double standards of the leaders who were not really interested in the people. The biggest problems were bureaucratic, because of so much corruption, the system did not work. From the beginning, I became interested in the lives of the citizens and for the children in my area, who walked more than 9 kilometers through difficult roads, to attend the nearest school. The parents to accompany their children did not have time to cultivate the land despite the abject poverty in which they lived. Some so as to sacrifice less of their children migrated to other villages. I gave myself the task of reclaiming the school much needed in the neighborhood. I reached the highest echelons of power in Cuba, passing through all the intermediate levels, and although I managed to get a school built, it was soon closed leaving the village and rural children in the same situation of helplessness.

For my work and demands in favor of reopening the school I started to be accused of being a leader and to the families of the farmers in my area they began to threaten to take their school age children away. I was threatened and repeatedly repressed by government officials and even in Havana I was expelled from the Council of State and threatened with being accused of threatening State Security. It was for all this stated before that I turned up on September 8, 2012 through Radio Marti, from the island, to denounce violations of human rights committed by the regime against the farmers and the people in general. From that moment I was a victim of several attempts on my life, attempts to physically eliminate me and other vandalism against my farm, animals and property, all organized by the regime and its political police, in an attempt to get rid of me. A young woman, Yudisleidy Lopez Rodriguez, warned me that the political police had offered a bounty to highly dangerous common prisoners for killing me. She was killed on September 26, 2014 for publicly denouncing it after I suffered an attack where they burned my bed in the early morning. Her murder was disguised as a crime of passion.

On May 24, 2015, I was attacked in my home by Osmani Carrión, sent by State Security to kill me. I am sure he was sent by the political police because after the fact I discovered that Carrion Osmani was a highly dangerous common prisoner who days before assaulting me had been granted parole. He attacked me with a machete cutting off my left hand, mutilating my right arm and both knees. He did not cut off my head thanks to the presence of a child at the scene, and to God who protected my life to be here today and give my testimony. In the days before the attack the regime had started a rumor that I had sold the farm and had left the area with the intention that the neighbors would not be preoccupied with my physical disappearance.

Today before this Subcommittee of Foreign Affairs of the United States Congress I want to ask two questions. Taking into account the U.S. government's new relations with the dictatorship of Cuba, I wonder:

Why has the situation of systematic human rights violations in Cuba not been a fundamental point in negotiations with the regime that has been 57 years in power?

How is it possible that the US government has made so many concessions to the government of Cuba without demanding respect for human rights on the island and justice for the many attacks on civil and political rights of Cubans? I am a direct witness of the manner in which the legal system functions where there are no procedural safeguards for citizens.

I am very grateful that over the years, other victims of repression in Cuba have presented themselves and have had this space to denounce and make known the Cuban reality. And I thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate here today. I just ask the government of the United States, international human rights organizations, and the governments of the free world not to abandon the people of Cuba in their struggle for freedom. Do not allow yourselves to be confused by the regime's propaganda campaign presenting Cuba as a country in transition. Cuba remains a military dictatorship, in Cuba human rights continue to be violated, and at this moment the people of Cuba are more alone than ever behind the curtain of foreign investors and North American tourists.

I ask you not to abandon Cuba and that our harsh reality be denounced.

Thank you very much.