

TESTIMONY OF JORGE LUIS GARCIA PEREZ "ANTUNEZ," BEFORE THE SUB COMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

This testimony is being delivered in English by Orlando Gutierrez-Boronat

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My name is Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez." I am a former Cuban political prisoner, who served a sentence of 17 continuous years of imprisonment for calling out for political and economic reforms of the type then being carried out in Eastern Europe, in a public plaza in my home town of Placetas, in central Cuba.

I was subjected to torture and to cruel and unusual punishment during my time spent in prison for both calling out for reform, and for being a "plantado," a political prisoner who refuses to participate in Regime indoctrination programs. As a prisoner, I constantly denounced the human rights violations that we were subjected to. I was sent to the most inhospitable and distant prisons in my country. With fellow political prisoners, in 1995 we founded the Pedro Luis Boitel Political Prisoners Organization, which managed to organize hundreds of political prisoners throughout the island in an unprecedented fashion.

After my release in 2007, I have continued with the struggle for freedom from inside Cuba, where I think that it is most important. I am currently active in the Orlando Zapata Cuban National Civic Resistance Front, a combative coalition of regional pro-democracy organizations which carries out public protests in demand of respect for human rights throughout the island of Cuba.

For this activity, and for having decided not to abandon my country, but instead to remain there, in order to continue with the struggle, my family and I have been subjected to a cruel repressive policy. I have been continuously arrested, and my life has been endangered on multiple occasions.

I have been subjected to torture, arrests and raids on my home by Castro's political police for denouncing the human rights situation in Cuba at international forums.

I am speaking here today on behalf of my brothers and sisters in the internal resistance, as well as of those who are still suffering political imprisonment in Cuba, because of their ideas. Scores of political prisoners remain in Cuban jails in spite of the supposed release of political prisoners carried out by the Castro Regime as a result of the Obama-Castro Accords.

Among my imprisoned brothers are: Ciro Alexis Casanova Perez, Ernesto Borges Perez, Andy Frometa Cuenca and Armando Sosa Fortuny. They are but a few names in a long list of heroes whose sole crime has been to oppose the dictatorship and to continue with their civic resistance from within prison walls.

A few days ago, we learned that the President of this great nation had come to an agreement with dictator Raul Castro. As a result of this agreement, the parties agreed to the establishment of full diplomatic relations, as well as to take steps towards the elimination of US sanctions against the Regime. Three convicted Cuban spies who were serving time in US prisons, one of which actively participated in the murder of American citizens over international waters and all of whom sought to destabilize this country, threatening its national security, were exchanged for imprisoned contractor Alan Gross.

These agreements are considered by a vital segment of the Cuban Resistance as a betrayal of the aspiration to freedom of the Cuban people. They are unacceptable to us. The principles and the right to

freedom of a country are not the property of any government, no matter how powerful or influential it is.

There is currently an international effort underway, expressed by the Obama-Castro Accords, to bring about some kind of evolution within the Castro Regime. This idea is simply a farce promoted by the Castro Regime in order to perpetuate itself in power. The Castro dictatorship cannot be reformed. It is based on the rejection of democratic values and everything these stand for. The Castro Regime is a tyrannical regime that seeks not just to control the Cuban people, but also to expand its repression to other countries, as is the case with Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

What would real change look like in Cuba?

It would mean the full restoration of civil rights.

It would mean a general amnesty for all political prisoners.

It would mean recognition of the right to organize independent political parties and labor unions.

It would mean genuine, internationally-supervised free elections.

It would mean separation from power of the Castro brothers.

All of this is recognized in current US law on Cuba policy, and it should remain this way because it constitutes the best type of support for the Cuban Resistance.

Since 1998, a majority of the Cuban Resistance has signed on to the Agreement for Democracy in Cuba, a 10-point roadmap towards a real transition to democracy. We ask recognition from the US Congress for this document and for what it represents as a consensus statement of the Cuban Resistance on the future of our nation.

I ask the people of the United States, as well as this freely-elected Congress, to maintain its firm support for the right of the Cuban people to be free. We may be close to real change in Cuba.

The drop in oil prices, the instability of the Maduro regime in Venezuela, which has been the main sponsor of the Castro dictatorship, as well as the civic resistance which is growing throughout Cuba and important initiatives aimed at coordinating this resistance, as is for example, the Rights and Freedoms Forum, are an example of all this.

This is the moment to demand real changes from the Castro Regime. This means: legalization of independent political parties and labor unions, internationally-supervised free elections, that the Castro brothers are separated from political power, as they have spent decades asphyxiating the Cuban people.

Only this can bring about normal relations between the United States and Cuba. Only this can mean an end to Cubans trying to flee from the island on improvised rafts, only this can mean an end to the exportation of authoritarianism to the rest of Latin America by the Castro Regime. Only this would mean an end to the existence of Cuba as a failed state under a military dictatorship.

Cubans can have the same success in the island that they have had abroad.

What we need is freedom.

The Cuban Resistance is struggling for that freedom.

We need your understanding and support.