

## In Cuba, Religious Freedom Remains a Dream

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In Cuba, every aspect of life is controlled by the state. Freedoms in general — and specifically freedom of religion — are not fully available, and persecution of those who publicly profess a creed exists today. Freedom of religion is a right that every human being should be allowed to enjoy without restriction of any government or political entity.

Religious leaders endure persecution and at times undergo threats from government officials. Some face difficult decisions when their lives and their families' lives are threatened. Due to fear, they comply with restrictions or requests to cease certain religious activity, such as outdoor concerts or baptism events.

Although officially the government does not favor any one church or religion, it appears to be more tolerant of those churches that maintain close relations with the state, such as those that belong to the "government friendly" Cuban Council of Churches.

The absence of religious freedom creates a climate of fear and lack of trust, which weakens civil society and creates greater distance between the citizens and those who govern them. And therefore, makes it more difficult to achieve any type of common national agenda.

Cubans should be free to promote the understanding of religious freedom embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), specifically Article 18, and other international covenants to their fellow citizens. These are human rights which provide dignity. It is the inherent patrimony of all human beings and a right of all Cubans. This is not something "allowed" or "gifted" by any country. Instead, it is the responsibility of the government to protect.

In Cuba, the church should be free to define the mission it believes it has received. Christians, Catholics and other believers must be free to practice their faith in whatever manner they believe necessary. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

