

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

December 7, 2021

Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles
EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi /Wetstraat 200 1049
Brussels Belgium

Dear High Representative Borrell:

As the Cuban people continue undeterred in their push to live free, we write to urge you to express your condemnation of the Cuban dictatorship's unjust detention of more than 600 political prisoners. Leaders from across Cuban civil society, including José Daniel Ferrer García, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Maykel Castillo Pérez, members of the Damas de Blanco, and Guillermo "El Coco" Fariñas, have long been the subject of arbitrary arrests and inhumane treatment. In the aftermath of historic island-wide protests in Cuba this year, their situation necessitates unwavering international pressure and we urge you to demand their immediate release.

For decades, Mr. Ferrer, the founder and leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU), has served as a champion of democracy and human rights on the island. As a leading member of the Christian Liberation Movement he was one of the 75 dissidents arrested during the infamous "Black Spring" in March 2003 and was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He was released on parole in 2011 and subsequently founded UNPACU. Mr. Ferrer's leadership at the UNPACU resulted in his arbitrary conviction in 2020 and a four-and-a-half-year sentence of house arrest, during which Ferrer reported "torture" and "constant humiliation."¹ On July 11, 2021, as he attempted to join the historic peaceful protests in Cuba, Mr. Ferrer was once again arrested on the grounds that he contravened the terms of his house arrest. This time, he describes facing an "intense and exasperating" situation in Mar Verde Prison in Santiago de Cuba.² The Cuban regime has placed him in solitary confinement, where he faces a lack of sufficient meals, ventilation, clothing, contact with his family, and medical treatment. All the while, Mr. Ferrer reports that the regime has subjected him to a psychologically harmful drug.³

The Cuban regime has also arbitrarily detained leading activists and artists from the San Isidro Movement. These include Luís Manuel Otero Alcántara, one of the movement's founding

¹ "Cuban government releases prominent dissident from jail but puts him under house arrest" *Miami Herald*, April 3rd, 2021, <https://www.miamiherald.com/article241758676.html>

² "Piden ayuda para "salvar la vida" de José Daniel Ferrer" *Diario las Américas*, November 8th, 2021, <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/piden-ayuda-salvar-la-vida-jose-daniel-ferrer-n4236394>

³ "Hermana de José Daniel Ferrer asegura que lo mantiene incomunicado" *Evtv Online*, November 8th, 2021, <https://evtv.online/digalo-aqui-hermana-de-jose-daniel-ferrer-asegura-que-lo-mantiene-incomunicado/>

members, as well as independent journalist Esteban Rodríguez and Maykel Castillo Pérez (a.k.a. Maykel Osorbo), one of the artists who collaborated in the Cuban anthem ‘Patria y Vida.’ Similarly, members of Las Damas de Blanco, a women-led nonviolent freedom and human rights movement, are bearing the weight of the regime’s repression. Sissi Abascal, one of the youngest member of the organization, could face a six-year sentence this month and other members of the movement are imprisoned or face sentencing. Additionally, Guillermo “El Coco” Fariñas, a psychologist, journalist, and leader of the United Anti-Totalitarian Forum (FANTU), is currently hospitalized in Santa Clara after being arbitrarily imprisoned on November 12, 2021. The protestors’ common experience under Cuba’s rule is one of brutal physical abuse by officers, overcrowding, disease, and lack of food, water, ventilation, light, and communication.

We are grateful for the numerous actions taken by the European Parliament to raise its concerns about the situation in Cuba, including its June 10, 2021 resolution on the human rights and political conditions in Cuba.⁴ We join its call for you to include members of the opposition to the Cuban regime and independent Cuban civil society in the formal public dialogues between the European Union and Cuba. We also appreciated the European Parliament’s September 16, 2021 resolution documenting the Díaz-Canel regime’s suppression of protests in Cuba, and explicitly condemning Mr. Ferrer’s arbitrary arrest and isolation from his family.⁵ We note that the European Parliament has acknowledged that, despite the existence of the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA), democracy and the respect for human rights have only worsened as the Cuban regime systematically violates the agreement and prevents dialogue. This has kept Cubans, such as Mr. Ferrer, in a recurring, vicious cycle of political retaliation and human rights violations.

We welcomed your July 29, 2021 statement calling for the release of all arbitrarily detained protesters and recognizing that Cuba requires internal economic reforms. However, the European Union has not fully leveraged its economic relationship with Cuba to achieve long-fought democratic progress. International pressure on the Cuban regime has worked previously, as is evidenced in 2020 when the regime commuted Mr. Ferrer’s four-and-a-half-year sentence to house arrest.

Today, Mr. Ferrer, and hundreds of Cuban freedom fighters, once again find themselves in a critical, life-threatening state. We urge you to maintain the EU’s historic commitment to the Cuban people, human rights, and democracy by renewing your call for the Cuban regime to immediately release Jose Daniel Ferrer, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Maykel Osorbo, and all political prisoners. We respectfully request that you expand European Union assistance to democracy activists and human rights defenders in Cuba and reevaluate the PDCA to ensure that it allows the European Union to facilitate progress for the Cuban people.

As millions of Cubans continue to clamor for ‘Patria y Vida’, we look forward to working with you and the European Union to reaffirm our shared commitment to furthering

⁴ *Resolution of 10 June 2021 on the human rights and political situation in Cuba*, European Parliament, June 10, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0292_EN.html

⁵ *Resolution of 16 September 2021 on the government crackdown on protests and citizens in Cuba*, 16 September 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0389_EN.html

democratic principles and protecting the rights of political prisoners. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized, cursive script.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Menendez', with a stylized, cursive script.

Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator