

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2021

Charles Michel
President of the European Council
Brussels, Belgium

Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission
Brussels, Belgium

David Sassoli, MEP
President of the European Parliament
Brussels, Belgium

Dear President Michel, High Representative Borrell, and President Sassoli,

We write to ensure that you are aware of the deteriorating human rights situation in Cuba, including the brutal crackdown on independent artists, musicians, and writers of the San Isidro Movement, as well as repression against other human rights activists throughout the island.

The oppressive nature of the dictatorship in Cuba has not changed despite the transfer of titles and sham, one-party “elections.” In fact, the regime has only continued to further entrench and expand its power. For example, it has cracked down on expression by independent Cuban artists, musicians, writers, and journalists of the San Isidro Movement with beatings, arrests, and internet blackouts. In addition, the regime cracked down on pro-democracy leader Jose Daniel Ferrer, who engaged in a hunger strike when the regime prohibited him and other members of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU) from distributing food to hungry Cubans from the organization’s headquarters. Ferrer, who was imprisoned during the infamous “Black Spring” of 2003, has once again been subject to severe abuse, imprisonment, and other forms of harassment for daring to oppose the regime in Cuba. For these reasons, renowned NGO Freedom House has labeled Cuba as “Not Free,” stating that, “Cuba’s one-party communist state outlaws political pluralism, bans independent media, suppresses dissent, and severely restricts basic civil liberties... The regime’s undemocratic character has not changed despite a generational transition in political leadership between 2018 and 2019 that included the introduction of a new constitution.”

The regime in Cuba also has a long history of racism. Almost no high level positions within the regime are occupied by Afro-Cubans. In addition, many of those who suffered the worst treatment at the hands of Castro’s thugs were Afro-Cubans, such as Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez, Berta Soler of the Ladies in White, Guillermo Farinas, recipient of the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize, Orlando Zapata Tamayo, and many more. The repression against Afro-Cubans continues with

brutal arrests against members of the San Isidro Movement, including internet blackouts to prevent members from communicating with each other and raising awareness of these human rights abuses.

In addition to the severe repression on the island, the regime in Cuba continues to destabilize countries in the Western Hemisphere by propping up the dictatorships in Venezuela and Nicaragua, supporting international terrorist groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), and harboring fugitives from U.S. justice including one of the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted Terrorists, Joanne Chesimard, terrorist bomb maker William Morales, and hijacker Charles Hill. Secretary General Luis Almagro of the Organization of American States (OAS) has stated that Cuba has an "occupation army" of thousands of Cuban military and intelligence agents inside Venezuela, propping up the Maduro regime. Due to the skyrocketing poverty, crime, and repression, nearly five million Venezuelans have fled the country, placing enormous strains on the region to meet dire humanitarian needs. The Cuban regime's influence in Venezuela has contributed to the hardship by assisting with repression. The U.S. State Department's 2020 Report on Human Rights Practices stated that—

State security officials frequently deployed to countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, where they trained and supported other organizations in their use of repressive tactics and human rights abuses and sometimes participated in the abuses directly. For instance, Cuban security force members were embedded in the Maduro regime's security and intelligence services in Venezuela and were instrumental in transforming Venezuela's Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) from a small organization focused on external threats to a much larger organization focused on surveilling Venezuelans and suppressing dissent. UN reports accused the DGCIM of torture, and many former Venezuelan prisoners said that Cubans, identified by their distinctive accents, supervised while DGCIM personnel tortured prisoners.

A December 2019 report from the Casla Institute, a Czech Republic-based NGO focused on governance in Latin America, stated the Cuban ambassador in Venezuela was personally involved in organizing this training. The Casla Institute report also stated, "Cubans constantly instruct members of the FANB [Venezuelan armed forces] and intelligence in techniques of repression, intimidation, and monitoring, so that they carry out investigation work and spy on their own colleagues and their families and political and social leaders, and directly intervene in social unrest."

The Cuban regime's malignancy is not confined to its borders, but has contributed to repression, violence, and destabilization throughout the Western Hemisphere.

We are also alarmed that the EU member states seem to look toward Spain for leadership in matters pertaining to the Western Hemisphere. Spain has historically had a poor record in our hemisphere and, in the case of Cuba, was forced to leave Cuba once the Cuban people won their independence. After decades of attempts by the Cuban people to rid their country of oppressive Spanish rule, the United States provided military support to the Cuban people in their war of independence. The Cuban people ultimately prevailed. It is ironic that more than a hundred years after the Cuban people won their independence, its former colonial oppressors now seek to strengthen the Cuban people's modern-day oppressors. Given Spain's specious record in Cuba, we urge you instead to heed the counsel of EU member states, such as Lithuania, that have undergone their own democratic transitions away from Communist totalitarianism. In fact, it was the European Community's (EC) steadfast dedication to democracy as a prerequisite to membership throughout the 1960s and 1970s that decisively contributed to the democratic transitions in Spain and Portugal. The economic and political pressures from the EC, conditioning full European membership on a commitment to democratic principles, proved instrumental

to the institutional reforms in the Iberian peninsula. Regrettably, Spain has not exercised the solidarity on behalf of democracy and human rights for the Cuban people that the European Community demonstrated for the people of Spain and Portugal. Just as international solidarity was essential to bringing freedom to the countries behind the Iron Curtain, and to Spain and Portugal, it is essential to promoting a democratic transition in totalitarian Cuba. Countries such as Lithuania are in an optimal position to guide Europe on the critical matter of transitions from totalitarianism to democracy.

The Cuban people have suffered for decades under dictatorial rule, in large part due to the lack of international solidarity. We urge you to consider the power that a concerted effort to support the Cuban people in their democratic aspirations could have to cause transformational, democratic change. We commend those member states such as Lithuania that have stood firm in supporting human rights and basic liberties in Cuba, and we urge all EU member states to similarly affirm these basic principles. When the Cuban people finally achieve their freedom, they will remember those who stood with them.

We write to urge the European Union (EU) to stand in unequivocal solidarity with the Cuban people and to refuse to expand trade or diplomatic relations with the oppressive Cuban regime until basic freedoms and human rights are recognized. Specifically, we request that you demand the immediate release of all political prisoners, the legalization of free expression, independent media, political parties, and labor unions, and the scheduling of free, fair, multiparty elections for the long-oppressed people of Cuba.

Sincerely,



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Alex X. Mooney
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress