

# **Baptists among clergy detained following Cuba protests**

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Cuban authorities have detained religious leaders—including at least three Baptists—in the wake of nationwide protests, action that drew rebuke from the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#).

“Cuban authorities are detaining religious leaders merely for peacefully protesting and calling for greater respect for human rights,” said James W. Carr with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

“Principal among human rights concerns in Cuba are the ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom, which include the persistent intimidation and harassment of religious leaders. USCIRF urges the United States to impose targeted sanctions on Cuban government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.”

## **Baptist ministers still detained**

[Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), a United Kingdom-based human rights organization focused on religious liberty, reported the detained ministers include Yeremi Blanco and Yarian Sierrra from the Berean Baptist Mission in Matanza and Yusniel Pérez Montejo with the Eastern Baptist Convention.



Detained ministers in Cuba include Yarian Sierra (left) and Yeremi Blanco from the Berean Baptist Mission in Matanza. (Facebook Photo via CSW)

The Baptist World Alliance has been in contact with Baptist leaders in Cuba “to assure them that the BWA family stands together with them in prayer, humanitarian aid, and in a commitment to human rights,” said BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown.

“The arrest of many who are pressing for democracy, including the arrest of several Baptist leaders, is deeply troubling. We continue to decry the pain and suffering endured by innocent persons and encourage people of good will to prayerfully stand in solidarity and to pursue transformative peace in the midst of the longstanding challenges faced by the people of Cuba,” Brown said.

Jatniel Pérez, president of William Carey Biblical Seminary, said Blanco and Sierra were being held in Matanzas, and they had been warned they would be detained at least a week, [CSW reported](#).

The detained ministers’ wives visited them July 12 and delivered some basic hygiene items, but they were insufficient for seven days, Pérez said.

On [social media](#), Pérez expressed concern for the health of the two men, given the rising number of COVID-19 infections in Matanzas and the pre-existing health issues of Blanco, who has bronchial asthma.

“We ask all international organizations to please support us in calling for the urgent release of these two pastors. We fear for their lives,” he wrote.

Pérez Montejo was detained in the province of Santiago, but his exact whereabouts were unknown as of July 13.

## **Catholic priest assaulted and then released**

Cuban authorities also assaulted and detained [Castor José Alvarez Devesa](#), a Catholic priest who has been an outspoken advocate for human rights. Alvarez later was released.

“We denounce in the strongest terms possible the use of violence against Father Álvarez, who has long been a strong proponent for religious freedom in Cuba,” Anurima Bhargava of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said.

Bhargava noted the commission called on the Cuban government “to immediately release religious leaders in their custody.”

Anna-Lee Stangle, head of advocacy for CSW, voiced its support for religious leaders and others in Cuba advocating for human rights and against violence.

“CSW stands with the people of Cuba in calling for freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. We are deeply concerned about reports of peaceful protesters, including religious leaders, being detained and beaten, as well as reported attempts to severely restrict the flow of information,

including by cutting off internet access in several cities. CSW stands with religious groups in Cuba in condemning calls to violence," she said.

"We urge the international community to make it clear to the Cuban government that it is time to listen to the calls of its people for peaceful and democratic change."