

# Cuban pastor sentenced to eight years in prison

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A Cuban Protestant pastor who has been detained since participating in peaceful protests last July has been sentenced to eight years in prison.

Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo's sentence was acknowledged in a document the Permanent Mission of Cuba in Geneva sent to the United Nations.

It was submitted in response to a [request from the UN Special Procedures](#)—experts tasked by the UN with investigating and reporting on human rights globally—seeking information about the pastor's treatment and continued detention.

However, Fajardo's wife—Maridilegnis Carballo—did not learn about her husband's fate until she was contacted by [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#).

## Accuses pastor of a violent attack

The [document from the Cuban government](#) asserts Fajardo, pastor of the nondenominational Monte de Sion Church in Palma Soriano, does not belong to a “recognized church.” It also denies he was a victim of religious persecution by the state.

During his initial detention at the Versalles State Security facility, Fajardo reportedly was beaten and urinated on by guards, and he lost a tooth due to the physical abuse. The following month, he was moved to Boniato Maximum Security Prison. He was tried in December on charges of “disrespect,” criminal incitement and public disorder.

The document claims Fajardo was involved in a violent attack on the headquarters of the Cuban Communist Party in Palma Soriano that left several people wounded. However, [video](#) and photographic evidence shows armed police and members of the Black Beret paramilitary force attacking unarmed civilians—including [Fajardo](#)—during a peaceful protest.

The government document also claims Fajardo's wife was notified of her husband's detention and told of his whereabouts within 24 hours. However, she said she was unable to confirm his location for three days.

## **‘So much injustice ... so many lies’**

CSW—a United Kingdom-based organization focused on the persecution of Christians—reported Fajardo's wife expressed “shock and anguish” when the organization made her aware of the government document and her husband's eight-year prison sentence.

“I don't know if I can bear so much injustice and so many lies,” she said. “How painful [it is] to see the disgraceful condition of the government of this nation. They speak of procedures, and yet, they have mostly just said lies.”

Carballo strongly denied her husband's involvement in any violent acts, and she insisted the state produced no convincing evidence at his trial.

“He did not use violence against anyone, and that was made more than clear,” she said. “They no longer even have the shame to hide their lies.”

## **Human rights groups call for pastor's release**

Anna Lee Stangl, head of advocacy for CSW, said her organization shares

Carballo's "frustration at the blatant lies that make up the majority of the government's response."

"It is unconscionable that the Cuban government would inform the United Nations via a public letter of its decision, apparently made in December, to sentence Reverend Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo to eight years in prison, before officially informing either the pastor or his family and months after the fact," Stangl said.

She said CSW calls on the Cuban government to release Fajardo and all others detained in connection with the July 11 peaceful protests and to "cease its harassment of all religious leaders."

[21Wilberforce](#), a human rights organization focused on international religious freedom, likewise called on the Cuban government to release Fajardo and live up to its constitution.

Although Cuba's constitution approved in 2019 includes protections for freedom of conscience and prohibits discrimination based on religion, religious persecution continues, said Lou Ann Sabatier, director of communications for 21Wilberforce.

"The Cuban Communist Party, through its office of religious affairs and the government's Ministry of Justice, continue to control most aspects of religious life, but they have increased persecution for people of faith. They harass and intimidate religious leaders in Cuba using smear campaigns, threats, detention and violence," Sabatier said.

"A glaring example is the disturbing news that Pastor Rosales Fajardo, who has suffered from all of these government actions, has been sentenced to eight years in prison. And the government has not communicated information about the sentence to his family. 21Wilberforce—along with the UN, NGOs and faith groups around the world—calls on the Cuban government to immediately release the pastor."