

Human Rights and Communist Cuba's Hostages

By Elsa Morejon Hernandez

The international community and the people of Cuba recently witnessed the signing of the International Agreements on Civic, Political, Social, and Cultural Rights by the Cuban government. Nevertheless, these agreements have yet to be put into practice. On the contrary, these rights are flagrantly violated against the will and wishes of the Cuban people. Cubans have publicly manifested their desire to enjoy these rights during prolonged debates among labor and student groups as well as on the streets of Havana. The following examples will demonstrate why we believe that we are still hostages without rights. The vast majority of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Cuba remain imprisoned for having asked for the signing of human rights agreements and their enactment so they can be enjoyed by the people of Cuba. One more proof of these violations are the four recent expatriations that the Cuban government forced upon four prisoners of conscience. They were released from prison and taken straight to an airplane and handed over to officials of the Spanish government under the pretense that this was a humanitarian gesture. It may well be that this brings an end to the suffering of the prisoners and their families. Nonetheless, it is an attitude on the part of the Cuban government that is counterproductive to the rule of law, unethical and antidemocratic.

Another example is described in an article in the *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, "No hipotequemos nuestro futuro" (let's not mortgage our future.) One of the opinions expressed in the article is that a considerable percentage of the Cuban population had lost interest in working and preferred to live off *meloriquero* (self employment considered illegal by the government) or live off others. However, the article did not mention that Cubans were forced to live in a paternalistic society for over three decades. They only began to be weaned off when socialism crumbled in Europe and when use of the American dollar stopped being illegal.

The Cuban government pays an average monthly salary of ten dollars to a common laborer and fifteen or twenty dollars to professionals. Just so you have somewhat of an idea, food items which are purchased with Cuban money acquired through the above mentioned salaries, have a cash equivalent to 260 Cuban pesos which are equal to 300 US dollars. There is talk of increasing jobs. However, no mention has been made about hiring people who were fired from their work sites because they expressed opposition to the communist system in Cuba. Another practice and way of thinking of those in power in Cuba and those who play along with them is to rename everything as a means of justifying not granting citizenship rights and imposing restrictions and prohibitions, to mention a few.

Due to their idiosyncrasy, it is difficult for the Cuban people to perceive themselves as victims. Yet, the history of the Jewish people does not differ greatly from that of the Cuban people. Many democratic governments as well as Cubans, have expressed, on repeated occasions, that the lack of rights and the absence of democracy are matters to be resolved by the Cuban people. It may very well be our responsibility to demand that the Cuban government sign and comply with International Agreements On Civic, Political, Social, And Cultural Rights which would be of benefit to all Cubans on the Island and living away from it. Otherwise, we will continue to be hostages without rights. However, no country nor civilized democratic government should be oblivious to the suffering of an enslaved people. Remember Eliecer (Elie Wiesel's essay): For the dead or for the living we have learned that even though everyone has the right to be different, no one has the right to be indifferent to suffering.

The writer is a Human Rights activist in Cuba and wife of Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet Gonzalez, prisoner of conscience and president of the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights.

Diario Las Américas
Miami, Florida
April 17, 2008