

Documenting human rights' abuses inside Cuba



Juan Carlos
Gonzalez Leiva

Biography

Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva is a lawyer of humble origins from the city of Ciego de Avila, Cuba. A tireless human rights activist, he has helped create numerous independent press agencies and libraries in homes all over the island to skirt state censorship. Having lost his vision permanently in 1990 after battling eye disease for years, he founded the Fraternity of the Independent Blind People of Cuba. He is also founder of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation and the **Cuban Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs**.

Juan Carlos is a devout Christian, member of the Baptist Church, with a deep ethical commitment to justice and freedom. He has paid a high price for his defense of human rights. After numerous short term detentions, in March 2002, authorities put a violent end to a peaceful demonstration he and nine other human rights activists held in front of a hospital where an independent journalist beaten by State Security had been taken. Juan Carlos was beaten and suffered a blow to the head that required stitches. During his ensuing 26-month imprisonment, he was denied his cane, glasses, and Braille Bible. Held in subhuman conditions, he endured psychological torture and the contamination of his cell and food with psychotropic substances. Deprived of medical care, his health suffered to the point his life was endangered. In April 2004, he was finally brought to trial and sentenced to four years of house arrest for the "crimes" of 'public disorder', 'disrespect', 'disobedience', and resistance'.

Juan Carlos has continued to face persistent harassment and threats as well as multiple detentions. The target of mass "acts of repudiation," he and his family have been confined for days without water, electricity and telephone as mobs have surrounded their home screaming insults, playing loud music, committing vandalism, and beating those who try to visit, all in complicity with State Security. Through it all, he has remained determined to continue his peaceful quest. In a video smuggled out of Cuba, he explains (in Spanish): "Justice can be sold and pride can be trampled on, but goodness floats above all things, it always endures. They can annihilate the opposition in Cuba, with only the government remaining. But there will be an opposition again, it will be reborn."

See You Tube interview with Juan Carlos, in Spanish, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ccnqB_ETWg>

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