

**Cuba**  
**Center for a Free Cuba submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review**  
**44th Session of the UPR Working Group, Oct-Nov 2023**

**REPORT ON EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS, THREATS, AND FORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN CUBA  
2019-2022**

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW - APRIL 2023

1. Our contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of the Cuban state this year 2023, will focus on specific events framed in the protests of the month of July 2021 in Cuba, the implications and results of which still affect thousands of imprisoned Cuban citizens, and have claimed innocent lives through the use of force by uniformed police force and repressive paramilitary forces that are part of the authorities of the Island of Cuba. We also include other cases of extrajudicial executions that are included in the time covered by this report.

**THE REFERENCED FACTS OF JULY 11 2021**

2. Between July 11 and July 17, 2021, hundreds of thousands of Cubans took to the streets of the Island in more than 20 cities and close to a thousand towns to demand freedom and change of government. The protests took place in the context of the humanitarian crisis of COVID 19, the collapse of many hospitals nationwide, the serious lack of services in morgues and cemeteries to care for the deceased, and the lack of medical care for the sick, all the while the authorities went out through the media and provided information that did not correspond to the reality that was lived in the country.
3. The protests began in the city of San Antonio de los Baños on the morning of Sunday, July 11, 2021, in the Parque de la Iglesia (park of the church) of that town with shouts of "No more communism." These demonstrations became massive and spread to many other cities in the country in a few hours. The marches were peaceful and went to the headquarters of the Communist Party, the only legal political organization in Cuba, and to the headquarters of the municipal and provincial governments, including the national headquarters of the Assembly of People's Power in Havana. Protesters chanted: "Freedom, freedom. Homeland and Life. Down with the dictatorship. Yes, we can"
4. The authorities mobilized the National Revolutionary Police, the State Security forces, the special brigades called black berets, and numerous recruits who were doing their Mandatory Military Service to confront the protests and prevent the protesters from reaching the headquarters of the Party and the government. Around 4 PM that same day, Miguel Díaz Canel gave the order to attack the protesters through a speech in which he said: "The order to combat has been given: revolutionaries to the streets. We call on all revolutionaries to take to the streets to defend the Revolution everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

5. According to witnesses of the events, members of State Security used strategies in numerous places to deactivate the protests, covertly inciting them to vandalize currency exchange stores (Free Convertible Currency) or to approach the coasts because supposedly boats would arrive from the United States to look for their relatives.
6. **Orelvis Cabrera Sotolongo**, an independent journalist for Cubanet in Cárdenas, Matanzas, witnessed these tactics:
7. “[...] the trucks entered with such a fury that they were ready to run over people as they turned the street. They are very big Russian war trucks. People were impressed, they took to the sidewalks, but they didn't leave. I go out walking and I hear a person who says "Let's break the stores." I look and, when I look, it was the State security agent who for more than seven years interrogated me, persecuted me, guarded me on the corner and I see that. He doesn't see me, but I do see him. And what do I do? I get into the crowd and start following him. He was on one sidewalk and I was on another, and I recorded him breaking the first store because it was a State security strategy.”<sup>2</sup>
8. **Kasandra Díaz Ortega**, who witnessed the events from the beginning of the protest in that same town, told the CCL:
9. “We are asking for freedom, we are asking for Diaz Canel to be present, we are asking for medication, enough is enough, we don't want him, we didn't choose him. That we wanted an answer. And a Major from State Security, I don't know his name, a mulatto said that they had orders from above not to do anything at that moment and that after a while passed, that is, what happened was that at 4 in the afternoon, Diaz Canel said on television that the revolutionary people should attack us. Until that moment they were a bit hesitant, and when they gave that answer, the State Security Major said they knew what they were doing. And right there, when the people were protesting they themselves said, look at the stores, they themselves were the ones who broke the stores because they themselves were the ones who insinuated it and there were many policemen in civilian clothes. And they themselves break the first stores that are the MLC ones that are on the corner of Real and Calzada streets and that is where the town divides and they begin to hit every person they can. That is where they beat **Lazara Karenia González Fernández**, who is currently imprisoned in La Bellotec” [...] With pure blows, and **yes, several boys were shot several times**. In the Servicentro de Palma, they shot **Jose Carlos Hernández Barrio**, a boy who lives on Avenida 45, behind the hospital. He was shot twice. This boy is currently a prisoner in the Combinado del Sur. They shot him twice, one through the foot and the other through the waist. **Gerardo Díaz Alonso** was also shot several times, he is in the Canaleta Prison and he is my nephew. They shot like crazy at a group of people. **Yoel Daniel Cárdenas Diaz**, **Enoc Noe Fernández Fernández**, and **Jorge Luis Argüelles**, these two are imprisoned in Agüica”.<sup>3</sup>

10. The authorities appeared at the homes of many of the protesters, 24 and 48 hours later, arresting them and shooting them at point-blank range, as was the case with Yoel Daniel Cárdenas Díaz.
11. “People who were in Playa Larga came in. What happened, so that it happened at 7:10 at night, when it was already, the sun had already fallen, it was already at two lights, seven and something of the night was at two lights. They say that everyone was on the shore waiting for the boats, the supposed boats, **and three trucks with rapid response brigades appeared, with rods and sticks in hand. Many had time to run towards the mountain, but those who did not have time to run towards the mountain and leave, well, took a stick, a stick. I saw a boy who came with his eye turned outwards, where I was. I saw the boy they call Cárdenas arrive with a shot in the foot** and he was manipulated by a general who picked him up the other day.”<sup>4</sup>
12. Kassandra Díaz Ortega commented on the case of Cárdenas Díaz: “They entered, armed, and shot him, the woman has the girls loaded and they push her and they lock her in the room. Her name is Marbelis. They pushed her, they shot him a couple of times and they shoot the dog too and kill it. They take him out full of blows and wounded, and they throw him in a truck, passed out, for all the neighbors to see.”<sup>5</sup>
13. The 24-year-old **Cristian Barrera Díaz** was declared missing on July 12. The authorities told his family that he was detained, but they were never able to see him. On August 5, they were informed that he had drowned and was buried in a common grave in the Cárdenas Cemetery. His sister Dianelys Barrera Taylor, a resident of Russia, denounced the incident.
14. “Why did they tell my father that my brother was in the group of those who were caught in Playa Larga waiting for a flotilla to leave the country illegally? Why did they tell my father that his son was in Matanzas, in a place in Versalles near the Maternity Home? Why did they tell you to find a lawyer to defend my brother? Why didn't they take a picture of my brother's corpse or show any of the clothing and belongings he had? Why didn't they use some means to publicize the news? So no one says anything. My brother buried in a common grave. After 20 days, they say the news. I don't want to assume, but for me it's that the police beat him up and then my brother died.”<sup>6</sup>
15. Human rights activist **Leticia Ramos Herrería**, a resident of Playa Larga, said that no one drowned there on July 11 or 12, but she did confirm that the authorities used blunt objects to beat many of the young people who gathered on the beach waiting for boats.
16. The fact that the body is found in a common grave implies that there were other deaths that have not been reported by the authorities.
17. There are other cases which, while unidentified, are known to those detained in Cárdenas, of young people who were beaten to death by political police officers.

18. "I was in *el Técnico* when some transfers from Cardenas arrived and they were telling the story of the Chief of the DTI, **Yordanki Perez Gamboa, known as El Indio**, who had beaten a boy within the Cárdenas police, he beat him tirelessly until the boy passed away. [...] To the police station, there they threaten me, yell at me, tell me again the same thing; that if they had seen me they would have shot me."<sup>7</sup>
19. The only death recognized by the Cuban government is that of **Diubis Laurencio Tejeda**, a 36-year-old black man who was shot in the back<sup>8</sup> by second lieutenant **Yoennis Pelegrín Hernández** in the town of La Güinera on the outskirts of the City of Havana, one of the places where the protests continued on July 12. The same officer injured at least five demonstrators in addition to causing the death of Diubis Laurencio Tejeda. International human rights organizations and residents of that town said that the protests were nonviolent and that excessive force was used against the demonstrators.<sup>9</sup> The Cuban News Agency, the official media of the Cuban government, presented Diubis as a criminal, a fact that his relatives and neighbors denied.
20. **Osiris José Puerto Terry** was shot by police officers in the Santos Suárez neighborhood of Havana on **July 11, 2021** during mass protests. According to his testimony, a squad of six officers had been shooting at the population. They shot him in the head but missed him. The second shot was in the leg, and when he fell to the ground they shot him in the back. A neighbor pulled him out of the line of bullet fire and took him to a safe place.<sup>10</sup>

(Video testimony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBw-5Tct548&t=1s>)

## DEATHS CAUSED BY PRISON AND BORDER GUARD AUTHORITIES

21. **On August 7, 2020, Yosvany Aróstegui Armenteros died in the custody of the prison authorities.** Aróstegui Armenteros was a political prisoner who was imprisoned in the Kilo 8 Prison in the City of Camagüey, Cuba. He had been sentenced to 15 years in prison for two common causes of which he pleaded not guilty. He went on a 40-day hunger strike to demand his freedom and died during that very strike. The family was unable to see him during the strike and he was immediately cremated, as they were unable to hold a wake. The defense lawyer hired by the family died in unexplained conditions a week before the trial. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg0lOQQ9kRc>). It is known that the prison authorities in Cuba deny water to prisoners who go on hunger strikes to force them to give up. However, if they refuse to give in to this measure of pressure, they are left to die without assistance.
22. On **October 27, 2022**, a boat with 29 people trying to escape from Cuba in the northern area of Bahía Honda, was rammed and split in half by a boat of border guard authorities, **resulting in the deaths of 6 people, including a 2-year-old girl.** This is not the only instance of this nature, but rather is the modus operandi of the Cuban authorities

regarding people who try to escape the country. The border guard boats ram the vessels, creating whirlpools of water to drown the survivors, as occurred during the sinking of the Tugboat in March 13 of 1994, among other examples. The victims were: **Omar Reyes Valdés, Nathali Acosta Lemus, Rachel Ramaya Ulloa, Elisabeth Meizoso (2 years old), Aimara Meizoso León, Yerandy García Meizoso.** The girl's mother said that her daughter's corpse showed severe blows to the body and head, and she considers that this was the cause of her death.<sup>11</sup>

23. In 2017, “the Committee against Forced Disappearance invited Cuba to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It also encouraged Cuba to recognize its responsibility to receive and examine individual and interstate Communications under articles 31 and 32 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. [...] The Committee against Enforced Disappearance encouraged Cuba to fully adjust its legal framework to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearance”.<sup>12</sup>

24. The facts, however, show that the government of Havana is not following the guidelines of the international system for the protection of human rights, and on the contrary, during the last 4 years there has been an increase in repression and direct violence with weapons of fire, or boats, against defenseless citizens. The events that occurred during the popular protests from July 11 to 17, 2021 show that the authorities are not only capable of reprimanding the right to express themselves freely and demonstrate discontent, but are also capable of forcing young recruits to repress their fellow citizens, to go to their homes to look for people identified through videos of the events that appeared on social networks, and shoot these citizens at point blank range. It is also capable of confining the detainees in subhuman conditions and using physical and psychological torture against them, threatening the relatives of the prisoners and of the people who are missing or who were killed in the streets of the Island, and manipulating the judicial processes eliminating any procedural guarantee.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cuba.cu/politica/2021-07-11/diaz-canel-al-pueblo-de-cuba-la-orden-de-combate-esta-dada-a-la-calle-los-revolucionarios/56654>

<sup>2</sup> Declaración del periodista independiente Orelvis Cabrera Sotolongo sobre los hechos ocurridos en Cárdenas, Matanzas, el 11 de julio de 2021. Grabación del Centro para una Cuba Libre.

<sup>3</sup> Declaración de Cassandra Díaz Ortega, testigo de los hechos ocurridos en Cárdenas, Matanzas y quien fue detenida luego de la manifestación. Grabación del Centro para una Cuba Libre.

<sup>4</sup> Declaración del periodista independiente Orelvis Cabrera Sotolongo sobre los hechos ocurridos en Cárdenas, Matanzas, el 11 de julio de 2021. Grabación del Centro para una Cuba Libre.

<sup>5</sup> Declaración de Cassandra Díaz Ortega, testigo de los hechos ocurridos en Cárdenas, Matanzas y quien fue detenida luego de la manifestación. Grabación del Centro para una Cuba Libre.

<sup>6</sup> <https://adncuba.com/noticias-de-cuba/actualidad/mal-trabajo-de-pnr-en-muerte-de-joven-cubano>

<sup>7</sup> Entrevista a Cassandra Díaz Ortega, CCL.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cubonet.org/noticias/un-policia-baleo-por-la-espalda-a-diubis-laurencio-tejeda/>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-62179137>

<sup>10</sup> Testimonio de Osiris Puerto Terry <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBw-5TCt548&t=1s>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/nos-embisti%C3%B3-y-la-parti%C3%B3-al-medio-afirma-madre-de-ni%C3%B1a-fallecida-en-hundimiento-de-lancha-en-bah%C3%ADa-honda/341276.html>

<sup>12</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/30/CUB/2- Grupo de Trabajo sobre el Examen Periódico Universal 30 Período de sesiones, 7 al 18 de mayo de 2018. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/066/26/PDF/G1806626.pdf?OpenElement>