

The State of the World's Human Rights; Cuba 2024

Background

In July, an independent study revealed that the population had declined by 18% over the previous two years, largely due to people leaving the country, often taking dangerous routes to do so.

Several legal amendments were approved that impacted the existence and operation of the so-called “new private forms of economy”, limiting the growth of the sector and economic and employment opportunities, and affecting access to basic goods and services provided by them.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Changes to economic policy and a reduction in social services affected vulnerable people, especially those over 65 years. According to media reports, the supply of subsidized “basic food baskets” by the government was significantly reduced and people had to stand in long queues to access groceries. In September, the government decreased the subsidized bread ration due to a shortage of ingredients.

Health services and access to medicines were severely limited. In July, official media such as Granma reported that the authorities acknowledged a significant shortage of supplies in pharmacies.

Access to electricity and fuel was restricted leading to difficulties in food preservation, suspension of education and health services. In October and November, there were three total failures in the national electricity supply, according to government communications. Significant parts of the country remained without power for up to 96 hours, severely affecting millions of people.

Freedom of expression

In October the Social Communication Law came into force, further restricting freedom of expression.

The authorities continued labelling activists and journalists as “common criminals, mercenaries and foreign agents” and called independent media outlets, journalists and influential individuals that criticize state policies “financial and media terrorists”.

In October a new wave of state repression affected independent media. At least 20 journalists and activists reported that their mobile phones and laptops had been confiscated by state officials, and that they had been threatened with criminal prosecutions.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

The authorities subjected artists, intellectuals and other critical voices to arbitrary detention including in their homes, with serious implications for their privacy and right to freedom of movement.

In June, academic Alina Bárbara López was arbitrarily and violently detained while on her way to the capital city, Havana.

Berta Soler, the leader of activist group Ladies in White was arbitrarily detained on several occasions, including a three-day enforced disappearance in September.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

The authorities regularly deployed police in areas where protests had taken place and other key areas such as Havana.

According to human rights organizations, at least 109 people were detained for participating in protests in 2024.¹ In November, the authorities reported the arrest and prosecution of several people for their participation in protests following Hurricane Rafael, on charges of contempt, public disorder and damage.

In April, 14 people were convicted for participating in peaceful protests in August 2022 in the municipality of Nuevitas. The charges included sedition, “continued enemy propaganda”, and acts against state security. According to available information, the harshest sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment was handed down to a young woman, Mayelín Rodríguez Prado, who was charged with sedition and enemy propaganda for streaming the protests on Facebook.

Human rights defenders

Repressive tactics against dissent included the criminalization and harassment of activists, journalists and human rights defenders, internet shutdowns, and fines under cybersecurity legislation.²

The authorities subjected human rights activists and defenders, including relatives of prisoners, to alarming harassment and surveillance.

Persistent patterns of repression targeting activists, human rights defenders, artists and journalists included bans on leaving the country and forced exile.

In June, Yuri Valle Roca, who was serving a sentence of five years’ imprisonment for “continued enemy propaganda” because of his work as an independent journalist, was released and forced to leave the country.

Inhumane detention conditions

There were alarming patterns of human rights violations against people detained for dissent against the government, including some practices that could amount to torture.

Human rights organizations reported harassment and ill-treatment by prison officials of people detained for political reasons, including the denial of adequate medical care resulting in the deterioration of their health.

The health of prisoners of conscience Loreto Hernández and Pedro Albert deteriorated and their families reported serious difficulties providing them with the food and medicines they needed.³ In November, Pedro Albert was released on a one-year “extra-penal” leave of absence for health reasons.

Prisoner of conscience and opposition leader José Daniel Ferrer was held for months in solitary confinement and isolated from other prisoners, and his family was systematically denied the right to visit him. In November, his family reported that he had been the victim of a brutal beating. In December, following a hunger strike, the authorities allowed his family visiting rights and telephone calls, and he was moved to an area with other prisoners.

Discrimination

Women, LGBTI people and Afro-descendants continued to experience discrimination, as did others on political and religious grounds.

Femicide continued without recognition as a specific crime in law. In July, the government approved a national system of “registration, attention, follow-up and monitoring” of gender- based violence in the country. Activists and independent organizations reported 55 femicides up to 25 December.
