

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Cuba
- **Publication date:**
18 July 2013
- **ecoi.net summary:** Quarterly updates on human rights situation [ID 244464]
- **Countries:**
Cuba
- **Original link** <http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk/human-rights-in-countries-of-concern/cuba/quarterly-updates-cuba/?showall=1>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Cuba, 18 July 2013 (available at [ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net))
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/244464/366666_en.html (accessed 31 October 2013)



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Cuba

Latest update: 30 June 2013

Cuba's Universal Periodic Review took place in Geneva on 1 May 2013. The UK welcomed the new migration law, which came into force on 14 January, but called on the Cuban government to end measures restricting freedom of expression and assembly, and to take steps to improve prison conditions and the right to a fair trial. The Cuban Foreign Minister confirmed, at the end of the session, that Cuba was likely to accept most of the recommendations received. The report will be adopted during the September session of the Human Rights Council, when Cuba must formally state which of the recommendations it will accept or reject.

The new migration law has lifted travel restrictions for the majority of Cubans leaving and returning to the country. Blogger and activist Yoani Sanchez; Berta Soler, leader of the Ladies in White Group; Elizardo Sanchez, founder of the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, and other Human Rights Defenders have been able to express their views overseas and have since returned to Cuba with new ideas. The Ladies in White were finally able to collect in April the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize that they were awarded in 2005. The family of late activist Oswaldo Payá were recently granted asylum in the US.

Independent journalist Calixto Ramon Martinez Arias was released on 9 April after 204 days in prison and two hunger strikes. Although he was never officially charged, Martinez was reportedly arrested for investigating allegations that medicine provided by the World Health Organization was not being properly distributed. The last remaining prisoner of conscience Marcos Máiquez Lima Cruz, was recently released from prison on health grounds. He was detained together with his brother Antonio Michel (released on 24 October 2012) on Christmas Day 2010 for "public disorder" and "insulting national symbols".

Politically motivated short-term detentions have continued. Illegal but tolerated human rights monitoring groups, such as Hablamos Press and the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, reported over 700 such detentions in April and May combined, although the figures are impossible to verify. There was a hunger strike in Eastern Cuba involving up to 60 people in protest at the detention on 9 April of 17-year old activist Luis Enrique Lozada Igarza. The strike ended when Lozada Igarza was released from jail on 8 May 2013.

Cuba opened its prisons to Cuban and foreign journalists on 9 April 2013. This was the first time journalists have been able to visit Cuban prisons since 2004. While a positive step, international organisations such as the Red Cross have not been granted access to Cuba's prisons.

On 4 June, the Cuban government opened 118 new internet cafes in a welcome but overdue move. At \$4.50 per hour, the service remains prohibitively expensive given average state salaries of around \$20 per month. However, the development represents a positive step towards greater freedom of expression and access to information.

Over the last three months, the government's limited economic reform programme has continued gradually to enhance economic opportunities for ordinary Cubans. The Council of Ministers announced in May, for example, that private intermediaries would be allowed to supply and buy from farmers.

Update: 31 March 2013

The new migration law represented a major step forward on freedom of movement in the past three months.

This in turn has allowed Cubans freedom to express their views when travelling abroad. Broader economic reforms continue to generate new economic freedoms and opportunities. The elections to the National Assembly were conducted partly in accordance with international standards, but genuine opposition parties and candidates could not participate. Politically motivated short-term detentions have continued and Amnesty International designated a second prisoner of conscience.

The new migration law, which came into force on 14 January, has lifted travel restrictions for the majority of Cubans leaving and returning to the island. Measures include the abolition of exit visa requirements and an extension from 12 to 24 months of the time Cubans can remain outside the country without special permission. This significant development for freedom of movement has been popular and has had a positive impact on freedom of expression, since Cubans are able to speak freely while travelling abroad. The Cuban Government allowed activist Yoani Sanchez to leave the country for the first time in nearly a decade; she is expressing her views on the situation in Cuba during an 80-day international tour. Berta Soler, leader of the group "Ladies in White", was also able to travel abroad recently. In the long term the migration law should also have a positive economic impact as Cubans return with new ideas, experience and capital.

Good Friday has been declared a public holiday this year in honour of the new Pope, in a further sign of improving religious freedoms. Separately, reports of faster internet connections following the installation of the broadband cable from Venezuela in 2012 could soon herald improved access to information on the Internet, although this may depend on whether the Cuban Government allows unfettered access.

The New National Assembly met on 24 February to elect its leadership for the next five years. Raul Castro was elected as President until 2018 and confirmed that he will step down after that. The electoral process itself was conducted partly in line with international standards with fair access to polls and a transparent secret balloting process. The vote also produced a legislature with a healthy gender and racial balance, with women and minority groups, including one transsexual, well represented. Genuine opposition candidates were unable to stand, however. An Embassy official monitored the elections.

Politically motivated short-term detentions have continued. Illegal but tolerated human rights monitoring groups Hablamos Press and the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported over 750 such detentions in January and February, though figures are impossible to verify. Berta Soler mentioned during her recent visit to Spain that Cuban security authorities continue to intimidate and harass opposition activists despite recent reforms.

Independent journalist Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias, detained since 16 September, was designated a Prisoner of Conscience on 30 January by Amnesty International. No formal charges have been laid against him, although he was reportedly arrested as he investigated allegations that medicine provided by the World Health Organization was not being properly distributed. According to various reports, including from Amnesty International, he went on hunger strike on 6 March to protest against his detention and was subsequently placed in solitary confinement. The other Prisoner of Conscience is Marcos Lima Cruz, detained on 25 December 2010 and sentenced to three years in jail for insulting national symbols and public disorder.

In March the Foreign and Commonwealth's Americas Director visited Cuba, where she met a range of Cuban government and civil society interlocutors and reiterated the UK's commitment to human rights.