OUTREACH AID TO THE AMERICAS
2020 WEBINAR SERIES

With the participation of:

Luis Almagro
Secretary General of the Organization of American States

John Barsa
USAID Acting Administrator

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Mara Tekach
Charge d’Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba

Josh Hodges
USAID Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean

Dr. Teo A. Babun
Outreach Aid to the Americas CEO
CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY
Amidst a Pandemic

WATCH THE 2020 WEBINARS HERE:

Cuba and COVID-19: Supporting the People and not the Dictatorship (May 7)
https://youtu.be/5eHchJYUBoM

Threats to Religious Freedom in the Western Hemisphere: A Closer Look at Cuba and Nicaragua (May 28)
https://youtu.be/5eHchJYUBoM

Cuba Exploits Coronavirus Pandemic to Undermine Religious Freedom (Jun 25)
https://youtu.be/5zY_oAvL09o

The Contribution of the Church in Nicaragua’s 2021 Presidential Elections (Jul 23)
https://youtu.be/8V4Zn2U-3O4

The Role of the Church and Faith-Based Activism in Repressive Countries (Aug 20)
https://youtu.be/T11flyNL3bs

Featured Panelists:

Fr. Castor José Álvarez (Cuba)

Mons. Carlos Avilés (Nicaragua)

Pastor Carlos Vielma (Venezuela)

Berta Valle (Nicaragua)

Rev. Saturnino Cerrato (Nicaragua)

Pastor Mario Felix (Cuba)
This webinar discussed Cuba's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as offering its medical services and professionals for money worldwide. The speakers also discussed the unprecedented challenges facing Cubans at home, including a decrepit health system, growing food insecurity, and rapidly climbing numbers of infections and deaths. We are proud to have offered an enlightening conversation about how Cuba is using this global crisis as an opportunity to revitalize its lucrative international medical missions, as well as the dangers that may present themselves to the legitimacy and governance capabilities of the regime. Several other international organizations, that focus on human rights also attended the event. With this webinar, we achieved our goal of demystifying the solidarity and humanitarian face the Cuban regime portrayed during this health emergency, by bringing to light the truth behind the mobilization of medical professionals.

"The ultimate failure [of Cuba's government] is that they cannot appeal to the sovereignty of the nation, which relies on the people, and the people of Cuba who nowadays cannot freely express themselves..."
-Luis Almagro

"The essence of a Cuban is to solve problems and to reach far, but the system that governs Cubans today prevents that. This is horrible."
-John Barsa
MAY 2020

Threats to Religious Freedom in the Western Hemisphere: A Closer Look at Cuba and Nicaragua

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eHchjYUBoM&t=8s

Panelists:

- Kirsten Lavery, USCIRF International Legal Specialist
- Zack Udin, USCIRF Researcher
- Dr. Teo Babun, OAA President and CEO
- Irela Guevara, OAA Program Director
- Testimony by Monsignor Carlos Aviles (Nicaragua)
- Pastor Mario F. Lleonart, Founder Instituto Patmos
Moderated by: Teo Babun, OAA President and CEO

The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) added Cuba and Nicaragua to its 2020 annual report of the world’s worst religious freedom violators. In 2019, Nicaragua was included for the first time ever on its special watchlist, an important development that comes at a time when the Catholic Church in Nicaragua faces a severe wave of persecution.

Conducted by OAA and Instituto Patmos, this virtual conversation took a closer look at the state of religious freedom in these countries—the ways in which authorities repress religious communities, how civil society and religious leaders are standing up for their rights and serving their communities despite numerous obstacles, and future prospects and opportunities for religious freedom. This discussion was largely informed by the experiences and work of OAA and Instituto Patmos’ partners on the ground, who experience state and societal hostility directly and who continue to lead the fight to ensure the protection of human rights for all.

“We have certainly seen significant negative developments in the freedom of religion and belief situation this year in Cuba”

-CSW Latin America Officer
Panelists:
- **James Carr**, USCRIF Commissioner
- **Erik Jennische**, Program Director, Civil Rights Defenders
- **Camilo Loret de Mola**, Cuban Legal and Political Analyst
- **Morgan Lee**, Host of “Quick to Listen” podcast, Christianity Today
- Special message from U.S. **Senator Marco Rubio**
- Testimonies by Cuban pastors: Sandy Cancino, Mario Felix

Moderated by: **Dr. Teo Babun**, OAA President and CEO

OAA held this virtual conversation about how the Cuban government took advantage of a time of great fear and uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic crisis to ramp up its repression against the Cuban church. Cuban authorities increased their harassment, intimidation, and unjust detentions of religious leaders and their families, even violating government-issued public health restrictions. The government was and stepping up its repression even as the church in Cuba extended its hand to help vulnerable communities such as elderly persons and the poor.

Our panel of distinguished speakers discussed how and why the faith community in Cuba is experiencing these attacks on its freedoms, and what they and advocates outside the island are doing, and can do, to defend against these attacks and promote freedom of religion and belief.
**JULY 2020**

The Contribution of the Church in Nicaragua's 2021 Presidential Elections

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V4Zn2U-3O4&t=1292s

Panelists:

- **Dr. Calvin Smith**, Principal and Tutor of Theology, King’s Evangelical Divinity School
- **Monsignor Carlos Avilés**, General Vicar of the Archdiocese of Managua and Coordinator of the Commission of Justice and Peace
- **Berta Valle**, MBA and Co-Founder of Voces en Libertad
- **Irela Guevara**, OAA Program Director
- Special guest **Josh Hodges**, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator in USAID’s Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Moderated by: **Dr. Teo Babun**, OAA President and CEO

Nicaragua is a predominantly religious country where many look to the Church and religious leaders for leadership and guidance. As a key part of civil society, the Church has sought to serve as a mediator in the social and political crisis that began in April 2018, and it has advocated for human rights and democratic values in response to repression by the government of Daniel Ortega.

In this webinar, a panel of experts in a wide range of facets of Nicaraguan politics, media and religion important issues such as how the Church and religious leaders can engage in the election process as civil society leaders continue to demand free and fair elections, and how the role of religious leaders in democratic processes will be affected as they continue to be subjected to human rights violations by the Ortega government and its supporters.

"The Catholic Church sees itself as having a role in encouraging believers' participation in democratic processes for the common good."

-Monsignor Carlos Avilés

"Since Ortega's rise to power, there has been a constant censorship of Nicaragua's press, which has affected the communications and media used by the evangelical and Catholic churches and communities."

-Berta Valle
AUGUST 2020
The Role of the Church and Faith-Based Activism in Repressive Countries
Cuba - Nicaragua - Venezuela
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI1IfyNL3bs&t=1608s

Panelists:

- John Barsa, USAID Acting Administrator
- Mara Tekach, Chargé d’Affaires at U.S. Embassy Havana
- Camilo Loret de Mola, Legal and Political Analyst
- Rev. Saturnino Cerrato, President of Partido de Restauracion Democratica (Nicaragua)
- Pastor Carlos Vielma, Vice President of Unión de Iglesias Cristianas de Venezuela/UNICRISTIANA

Moderated by Dr. Teo Babun, OAA President and CEO

In this webinar, a panel of faith-based activists and key actors in the fight for religious freedom discussed the role of the church and faith-based activism in repressive contexts, focusing on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The authoritarian regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela recognize the large presence and powerful influence of religious groups in their societies; as such, these regimes frequently attempt to impede faith-based organizations and communities from carrying out social action to help the poor and vulnerable, and violate their religious freedom, frequently in systematic and violent ways.

“...The Church in Nicaragua is bold enough to speak up about the rampant human rights abuses and violations of basic freedoms."
- John Barsa

Panelists considered the differing political and social challenges facing religious actors in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. These range from situations where the church is a small but growing and vocal advocate for human rights and social improvements, to contexts where religious actors call for peace and seek to mediate between democratic civil society and abusive governments determined to hold on to power. As Nicaragua faces important elections next year, Cuba struggles with the economic and political fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, and Venezuela seeks an exit from a deep political and humanitarian crisis, communities of faith have a critical role to play. This webinar focused on what this will be, and how the U.S. and the international community can support positive change.
The Cuban law is being used against activists and journalists… Everything that is contrary to the state’s narrative is criminalized.

-Claudia Ordoñez

On November 16, OAA and Christian Solidarity Worldwide held the virtual event, Misleading Media: Recent Trends in State-Sanctioned Media Campaigns to Undermine FoRB and Human Rights in Cuba. This panel of experts and leaders from in and outside of Cuba discussed recent developments related to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and human rights within Cuban civil society, such as how the Cuban government is attempting to frame domestic and international advocacy on FoRB as an "act of aggression against the island." The panel also looked at how Cuban state security agents are carrying out disinformation campaigns through traditional media outlets and social media, targeting individual faith leaders, specific religious groups and even faith-based umbrella organizations like the Cuban Evangelical Alliance.

Panelists:

- Ed Brown, Secretary General, Stefanus Alliance International
- Juan Torres, Cuban Human Rights Defender
- Claudia Ordoñez, Program Officer for Central America and the Caribbean - Article 19
- Anna Lee Stangl, Head of Advocacy, Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- Dr. Teo Babun, OAA President and CEO

"The Cuban law is being used against activists and journalists… Everything that is contrary to the state’s narrative is criminalized."

-Claudia Ordoñez