



ADVOCACY



ADVOCACY

ad·vo·ca·cy:

noun

Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. An activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions.

Advocacy is at the heart of the existence of our organization. OAA brings awareness, promotes and equips partners to advocate for human rights for themselves and for their communities in the Americas, with an emphasis on Cuba. We are dedicated to promoting fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. We provide resources, education and training to raise awareness, build capacity, and empower people on the ground and in the front lines of the struggle for freedom. We collaborate with civil society grassroots organizations, activists, victims, religious leaders from diverse faith traditions, government, and with other like-minded stakeholders to inspire the public to “look beneath the surface” and help find a solution to end discrimination and violations to fundamental rights.



ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

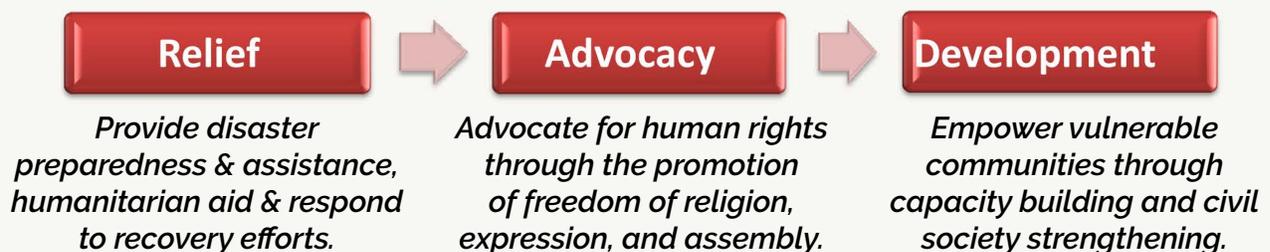
One of OAA's Key Programs has been advancing Freedom of Religion and Belief. Inherent in religious freedom is the right to believe or not believe as one's conscience leads, and live out one's beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear. Freedom of Religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching". OAA defends this principal.

Our purpose is to provide aid, alleviate the suffering, and improve the dignity and quality of life of individuals, families, and communities, in a way that supports positive change towards sustainable development and respect for fundamental freedoms. We also promote citizen participation in developing community programs.

Our key distinctive and our strength is the trust we have earned over more than 27 years of experience; OAA has proven methodologies and tools to provide capacity building and assistance to vulnerable people and communities through faith-based local partners. OAA targeted interventions improve the lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged people; people who permanently or during crisis do not have the resources to live active and healthy lives.



OAA's Advocacy Team at a staff retreat in Deerfield Beach, Florida



Previous panelists:

WEBINARS & FORUMS

OAA regularly conducts and hosts webinars and panels of faith-based activists and key actors in the fight for religious freedom discussing the role of the church and faith-based activism in repressive contexts, focusing on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The authoritarian regimes in these countries 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. This repression is contrary not only to universally recognized human rights but is also counterproductive because religious groups are active and essential in tackling the socioeconomic crises that afflict these countries.



Luis Almagro
 Secretary General of the
 Organization of American
 States



Dr. Ahmed Shaheed
 UN Special Rapporteur
 for Freedom of
 Religion or Belief



Marco Rubio
 U.S. Senator

REALITIES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA 

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

Panel I: Promoting Religious Freedom in Cuba from Abroad (12:00-1:00 pm EST)

- Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Dan Nadel, Director, Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State

Moderated by Dr. Teo Babún, President and CEO, OAA

Panel II: The View from the Ground (2:30-3:30 pm EST)

- Luis Alberto Torres Rondón, Cuban pastor
- Yoe Suárez, independent Cuban journalist

Moderated by Anna-Lee Stangl, Head of Advocacy, CSW

 **OAA**
 Livestream on OAA's YouTube channel



**By Dr. Teo Babun,
President & CEO**

OP-EDS

Miami Herald	Washington Examiner
<i>May 27, 2020</i> Cuba uses the coronavirus crisis to continue to harass, imprison religious leaders	<i>November 5, 2020</i> Cuba should look to the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan as an example for improving religious freedom
Miami Herald	Miami Herald
<i>May 26, 2021</i> Catholic leaders in Cuba speak out against repression. They need our support.	<i>October 10, 2021</i> Say a prayer for Cuba and the destiny of its people
Sun-Sentinel	Washington Examiner
<i>July 27, 2021</i> Cuban religious leaders have been preparing for this moment	<i>March 29, 2022</i> With all eyes on Ukraine, Latin American dictators attack religious freedom
Miami Herald	Washington Post
<i>March 3, 2019</i> Cuba's new constitution fails to guarantee fundamental freedoms. Cuban's saw through the charade.	<i>March 26, 2021</i> How pope Benedict could shape religious freedom in Cuba

"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..."

-OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro



Source: Subayado.com

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, RIGHT TO VOTE, and NON-VIOLENCE TRAINING

OAA collaborates with highly experienced partner implementers and stakeholders to develop local capacity for rights violations monitoring and international advocacy. OAA carefully selects, trains, and supports committed local faith leaders and civic society stakeholders who forge interfaith alliances and carry out human rights advocacy and pro-reform activities.

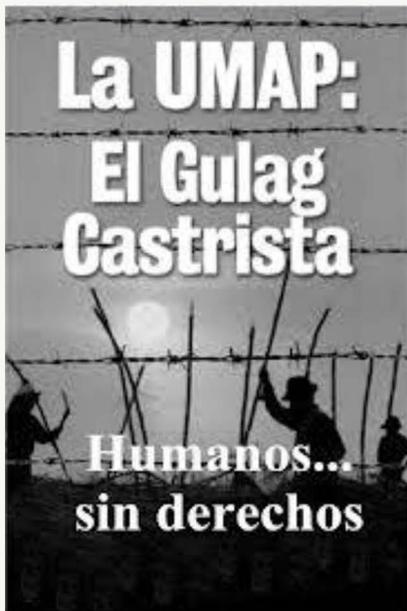


Cubans on the island wearing a shirt created by members of C3 along with other promotional materials, such as stickers, upon their return to Cuba.

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

-CSW Latin America Officer, 2021





WHITE PAPERS & REPORTS

Recent White Papers and Reports

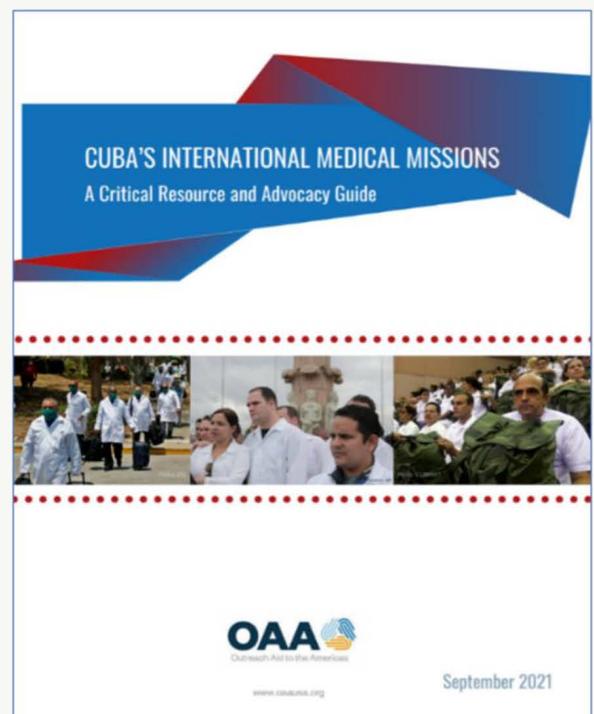
- **Nicaragua's Evolving Religious Freedom Crisis**
- **The Faith Community in Venezuela: On the Front Lines of an Unprecedented Humanitarian Crisis**
- **Historical and Root Causes of Migration from the Northern Triangle Countries**
- **Cuba's International Medical Mission: A Critical Resource and Advocacy Guide**
- **July 11 and Faith Community Leadership in Cuba**

OAA regularly produces white papers and reports designed to help diverse audiences learn about specific issues and to offer recommendations for policymakers and others. Some of these papers present, examine, and analyze the religious landscape and human rights conditions in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Others examine different issues affecting vulnerable people in the Americas, such as root causes of migration in Central America and the role of religious actors in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

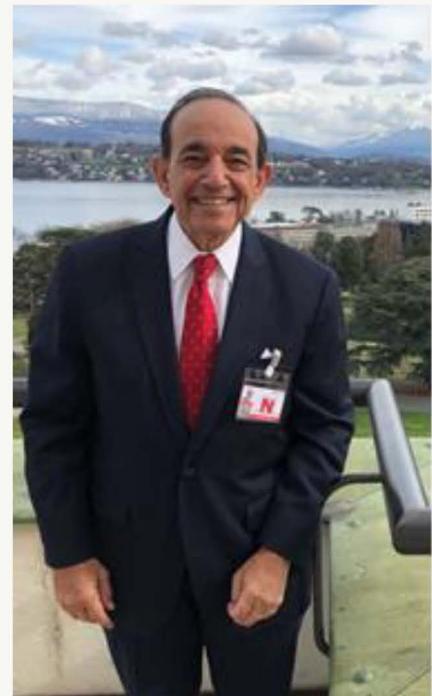
OAA also uses these tools to report on human rights violations against religious leaders and human rights defenders, and for advocacy before relevant bodies such as the Organization of American States and the UN Human Rights Council.

“Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela undermine constitutional guarantees using vague and contradictory laws, decrees, and bureaucratic tactics to persecute faith communities arbitrarily.”

-Dr. Teo Babun



INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY



With more training support and advocacy from regional stakeholders, such as influential neighboring countries, the Organization of American States, and the U.S., plus the European Union and the UN, faith-based actors can play a more effective role in monitoring and reporting on human rights violations and in promoting nonviolent action, national dialogue, and respect for human rights. None of this is possible, however, without the ability to exercise religious freedom and interrelated rights such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. We work to elevate human rights defenders' voices at international fora to amplify their calls for justice and to maximize our combined impact.



“The environment in Cuba is one of hostility toward religion.”

-UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed



Verdades Sobre las Misiones Medicas Cubanas: Esclavitud Moderna
1,734 views • Jul 20, 2021

Screenshot of video about abuses perpetrated through Cuba's medical missions

OAA produces and distributes videos about the demand for fundamental human rights and other related topics, such as free and fair elections, institutionalism, democracy, freedom of expression and assembly, and the release of unjustly held political prisoners. Sometimes these videos are created by partners in the countries where we work.

The videos are posted on our social media, reaching thousands of people, and broadcast on radio, reaching hundreds of thousands of people.



VIDEOS & MEDIA IMPACT



Fr. Castor José Álvarez (Cuba)



Mons. Carlos Avilés (Nicaragua)



Berta Valle (Nicaragua)



Pastor Carlos Vielma (Venezuela)

FREEDOM OF RELIGION & BELIEF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



OAA promotes accountability for religious freedom abuses by monitoring, documenting and reporting religious freedom abuses committed by regimes mainly in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

In Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela the government stifles civil society, and growing churches and church networks have by default become the largest component of an independent civil society. As in other country settings around the world, these faith leaders and the faith community are stepping into the role of calling for respect for human rights and speaking up for human rights defenders who face harassment, intimidation, and violence for their activities.

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 under the Ortega-Murillo regime.



"Authoritarian countries such as Cuba and Nicaragua use similar tactics to undermine democracy by closing down the voices of independent civic society, including outspoken faith leaders whose viewpoints vary from Socialist state doctrine"

-CSW Latin America Officer

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

-Monsignor Carlos Avilés (Nicaragua)



CUBAN MEDICAL MISSIONS: MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2019 the State Department recognized that Havana's export of some 50,000 Cuban healthcare workers, employed in more than 60 countries, was "a major source of income for the regime." It added that it had found "indicators of human trafficking in Cuba's overseas medical missions each year" since 2010 and that it was "deeply concerned about these abuses." These medical missions have also been condemned for their human rights abuses by international human rights experts and observers such as United Nations Special Rapporteurs and Human Rights Watch.

The Cuban regime traffics a variety of Cuban workers, including athletes. But doctors, nurses and medical technicians are especially valuable for generating revenue. They are also made to spread communist propaganda, falsify data and provide medical attention on condition of support for preferred political parties and candidates. The mission participants are treated as slave labor: they are often not provided a copy of their contract, their passport is confiscated, and they are severely punished if they defect or fail to complete their mission. The infamous "8-year law," for example, bars the offending worker from returning to Cuba for eight years, often separating him or her from children and elderly parents needing support.

The regime boasts that its program is evidence of its commitment to altruism and solidarity with the world's poor. But the true face of this scheme is becoming better known thanks to the efforts of advocates and to the brave doctors and others who have come forward to share their testimonies.

**"Everything is acceptable in
pursuit of the socialist dream."
-Lenin**

EL ESPEJO

El lucrativo negocio de los médicos cubanos para el régimen



Javier Peña of OAA on "El Espejo" show on America Teve discussing Cuba's medical missions

OAA ADVOCACY GOALS

- Assist religious and human rights NGOs in promoting religious freedom in Central America and Cuba.
- Engage North American faith-based communities to learn about the situation of local FBOs, and invite them to participate in solutions.
- Create awareness that will empower people who are seeking freedoms and greater human rights.
- Conduct comprehensive analyses of the legal landscapes and mechanisms used to curtail freedom of religion or belief.
- Create and implement strategic outreach and advocacy plans (SOAPs) to end the use of discrimination laws and bureaucratic measures used to repress civil society organizations, including those in the faith community.

*“Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

(Proverbs 31:9)



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