

New Report: Cuban Human Rights Defenders Call on the EU to Act to Stop the Deteriorating Human Rights Situation

According to a new report released by Civil Rights Defenders, 70 out of 70 surveyed human rights defenders in Cuba say that the human rights situation in the country has deteriorated since the EU signed the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with the Cuban government in 2016. They also state that the Cuban government has no intention to follow the human rights clauses in the agreement.

“If the EU is to uphold its credibility as a part of international agreements, it needs to act to make sure that Cuba lives up to its commitments. And if Cuba continues to breach core parts of the agreement, there are mechanisms to use to suspend it”, said Erik Jennische, Director Latin America Department at Civil Rights Defenders.

BACKGROUND

The EU and Cuba have organised a Human Rights Dialogue every autumn since 2015. However, neither Cuban human rights organisations nor European organisations working for human rights in Cuba have been allowed to participate.

To ensure that the Cuban human rights perspective is still present in the dialogue, Civil Rights Defenders surveyed 70 Cuban human rights defenders living in Cuba, and 40 living abroad on the human rights results of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Cuba. All of the respondents accepted that their names would be public, and that their contact details would be sent to the European External Action Service in Brussels, and to the EU-delegation in Havana. (The complete results of the survey can be found in the attached report or [here](#)).

The dates for the Human Rights dialogue, normally held in early October every year, have not been announced yet for 2020.

RESULTS

Several clear results emerge from the survey:

1. 68 out of the 70 respondents living in Cuba would like to engage in a dialogue with the EU delegation in Havana on the Agreement.
2. The human rights situation in Cuba has deteriorated since 2016. Not only do all the respondents in Cuba say so, but 39 of the 40 respondents living abroad agree. The report includes quotes by several respondents, among them Laritza Diversent, Yoani Sanchez, Boris González Arenas, and Camila Acosta Rodríguez.
3. 108 out of 110 respondents say that the government is not complying with the key human rights article in the agreement (Article 1:5), which says that:

“Respect for and the promotion of democratic principles, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms [...] and respect for the rule of law constitute an essential element of this Agreement.”

No respondent believes the government has the intention to do so either.

4. All respondents answering that Cuba is not complying with the Agreement say that the EU should act. Their answers are evenly distributed between *call the parties to an urgent meeting, present the relevant information to the other party to find an acceptable solution to both parties* – both options considered in Article 85:1-4 of the Agreement – and *start a discussion within the EU on what measures to take*.

The answer standing out is that 33 respondents out of 70 living in Cuba said that *the EU should start the process to suspend the Agreement*.

SUMMARY OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' CONCLUSIONS

First, although the respondents were not chosen by random selection, they represent a significant number of organisations in the Cuban independent civil society. It will therefore be difficult to find any significant number of civil society actors believing that the current EU policy will have any positive effect on human rights in Cuba.

Second, the EU has vast possibilities to and should create an extensive network of Cuban human rights defenders inside and outside of the island. Cuban human rights defenders want to engage with the EU in an open and formal way.

Some of the respondents want the EU to bring all the problems with the Cuban government to the table; others want to suspend the Agreement. Their differences in strategy are neither a weakness nor evidence of polarisation, but simply illustrate that the Cuban civil society is diverse. There are good arguments on all sides, and the EU would benefit from permitting itself to have a constructive discussion with actors representing the whole spectrum of positions.

Third, if the EU does not change strategy – and starts demanding that the Cuban government respects the Agreement – it will lose credibility as a relevant partner for the civil society. That would decrease the EU's influence on the Cuban government, as backing from civil society is necessary if it is to achieve results when it comes to human rights.

CONTACT US FOR A COMMENT

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