

**THEY WANT
TO SILENCE US
BUT WE WILL CONTINUE
TO RESIST**

Authoritarian practices and
state violence against
women in Cuba.



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the state repression and violence exercised by the Cuban authorities against women human rights defenders, activists and journalists. By means of entrenched authoritarian practices such as arbitrary detention, unlawful surveillance, misuse of the criminal justice system, physical and psychological violence, and violations of the right to a fair trial, the authorities seek to silence critical and dissenting voices. In the case of women, the systematic repression and politically motivated discrimination suffered by those perceived as opponents or dissidents is aggravated by patterns of institutionalized gender-based violence that use motherhood, caregiving responsibilities and private and family life as tools for intimidation. This violence is neither incidental nor random, but structural, sustained and directed particularly against women who challenge and question state policies.

The research methodology included interviews with women human rights defenders, activists, journalists, witnesses and experts. In addition, legal documents, social media posts, official and independent media reports and national and international legislation were reviewed. Six representative cases were analysed, covering incidents that occurred between 2014 and 2025 in the context of social protests, the pandemic and cycles of repression, and the impact of the feminist, LGBTIQ+, artistic and animal rights movements was considered. The study also incorporated reports from international bodies and Cuban human rights organizations.

The report provides a detailed analysis of six cases of human rights violations against Yenisey Taboada, Luz Escobar, Carolina Barrero, María Matienzo, Camila Lobón and Alina Bárbara López, activists and journalists subjected to multiple forms of repression, including unjust criminalization, defamation campaigns, forced exile and unlawful digital surveillance. A particular focus is placed on documenting the psychological and social impact of such practices. These cases highlight the reality of a larger number of women who have suffered similar experiences.

The research analyses the use by the Cuban authorities of institutional and state architecture to exercise different authoritarian practices to continue stifling criticism and dissent. In addition, it describes a repressive context marked by restrictions on civil and political rights, politically motivated discrimination and the undue criminalization of activism and the defence of human rights. The report also examines institutional gender-based violence, which includes threats against children, surveillance in schools, and stigmatization based on age, appearance and sexual orientation. Lastly, it documents the misuse of criminal law to punish the exercise of human rights, and the commission of serious violations of due process, including express trials, the absence of an independent legal defence and improper summons.

The conclusions reveal that women human rights defenders, activists and journalists in Cuba are victims of entrenched authoritarian practices and a pattern of state repression that includes physical, psychological, institutional and symbolic violence. This repression is aggravated by a gender bias that uses motherhood, caregiving responsibilities and private and family life as tools for intimidation. The findings of the research show that women face specific forms of violence because of their gender, race, class and sexual orientation, in an environment marked by a lack of judicial independence, the subordination of the legal system to political power and the absence of effective mechanisms for reporting, protection and redress. The Cuban state is in breach of its international obligations regarding human rights in general, and women's rights in particular. It perpetuates impunity, and punishes and deliberately excludes women who denounce human rights violations and openly criticize state policies from participating in the public debate.

The recommendations to the Cuban state focus on the need to ratify key international human rights treaties, reform the Penal Code to eliminate vague and repressive provisions such as contempt, public disorder and resistance, and guarantee the right to a fair trial, judicial independence and protection of privacy. The state is urged to protect women human rights defenders, journalists and activists, end repression and arbitrary detention against them, and ensure impartial investigations into human rights violations. In terms of gender, recommendations are made to adopt a comprehensive

law against gender-based violence, protect women defenders through an intersectional approach, cease the use of motherhood as a tool for repression, and punish institutional gender violence. Amnesty International also calls for women's right of association to be guaranteed and intersectional discrimination recognized. The international community is urged to continue monitoring the situation in Cuba, demand cooperation with international mechanisms, support independent civil society, raise awareness regarding those detained for exercising their rights, and advocate for effective public policies against gender-based violence, including through the collection of disaggregated data and access to specialized services for victims.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research is part of Amnesty International's "Cuba without repression" project, which aims to increase understanding and awareness of human rights violations in Cuba and contribute to the collective efforts to pressure the Cuban authorities into upholding their international human rights obligations and thus into eradicating the policies, laws and authoritarian practices that unduly punish and repress dissent.

In the report, Amnesty International analyses various patterns of repression experienced by Cuban women who defend human rights or practice journalism or political activism. Of particular concern is the way in which the authorities exploit their role as mothers and caregivers to apply a wider range of repressive actions, which has in turn resulted in family members and close friends also becoming targets of state repression. The research identifies repressive mechanisms, tactics, policies and laws that are used to harass, threaten and punish women for criticizing state policies, and shows how these mechanisms serve to inhibit others from taking a critical position, participating in public affairs, exercising their right to freedom of association or defending rights.

The methodology included a review of:

- National and international legislation and reports from international bodies and organizations and Cuban human rights organizations. Official reports and statistics from the Cuban government and speeches by political leaders and government-aligned social organizations (the only constitutionally recognized organizations) were also reviewed. The documentary review included accountability reports submitted by the People's Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office to the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuba's legislative body).
- Legal and judicial documents, including summonses, warnings, court rulings and provisional findings issued by prosecutors' offices.
- Publicly accessible information such as media reports, including articles by official media, videos, photographs and social media posts.

Amnesty International interviewed a total of 52 women, including Cuban activists and human rights defenders who have been victims of human rights violations (34), members of Cuban collectives and civil society organizations that document such violations (11), and relevant witnesses and experts, including analysts and academics (7).

The report focuses on a number of cases which are representative of patterns of human rights violations over the period 2014–2025 and serve to highlight the reality of a larger number of women who have suffered similar experiences. The period analysed responds to recent cycles of state repression against activism, social protest – including the mass protests of 2021 –, independent journalism and the work of organized civil society. It also covers significant events in the country's political context, including the period following negotiations for restoring diplomatic relations with the United States, and the restrictions derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alina Bárbara López Hernández

Alina Bárbara López is a 60-year-old historian and intellectual. An essayist, independent media editor, and activist, in recent years she has faced escalating repression ranging from subtle threats and intimidation to criminalization, with legal proceedings for contempt, disobedience, and assault. For the latter, she faces a possible sentence of four years of correctional labor without imprisonment.

Alina has defined herself as a woman with democratic ideals, advocating for the need for national dialogue between the government and citizens, the elimination of the US economic embargo, and women's rights. She is also an outspoken critic of the Cuban government and has denounced the state repression suffered by her and others.

3. ENTRENCHED AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES AND STATE VIOLENCE

Authoritarian practices can be broadly understood as actions taken by the state and other powerful actors to consolidate power, silence critical and dissenting voices, evade accountability and instil fear in the population.¹ Authoritarian practices often constitute human rights violations or create the conditions for such violations to occur.

When analysing authoritarian practices, it is important to consider the context in which they occur, including the political, economic, social and other factors that facilitate the practice and consolidate power. These practices are rarely observed in isolation and often overlap. This corrosive effect goes beyond individual actions and creates a more fertile ground for impunity and the commission of new human rights violations.

In Cuba, authoritarian practices and state violence are systematic and affect not only civil and political rights, but also the economic and social rights of the population and, in particular, the rights of dissidents or those perceived as such. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), state violence occurs when a state fails to protect the civilian population from armed or criminal actors, actively participates in human rights violations such as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and the repression of protests, or facilitates impunity by failing to uphold its obligation to investigate and punish those responsible for human rights violations.²

For decades, the Cuban state has subjected critics and dissidents to systematic forms of repression, hindering their ability to exercise their rights and participate in public affairs. The Cuban government stifles dissent and punishes all forms of public expressions of dissent, whether through protests or the use of social media. To achieve this, the authorities systematically resort to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, abusive surveillance, unlawful restrictions on movement, excessive use of force and gender-based violence.

3.1. A REPRESSIVE CONTEXT

Cuba has been in a permanent humanitarian crisis for decades, with worsening basic services such as health and education and an increase in poverty. At the same time, peaceful social protests have seen an increase over the last few years, in many cases driven by civic and cultural movements that have grown their activism in light of a failure to uphold and guarantee human rights. In this context, the Cuban authorities have continued to perfect a sophisticated machinery for suppressing the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and maintain serious restrictions on political participation.³

¹ Marlies Glasius, *Authoritarian Practices in a Global Age*, 2023

² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (n.d.). *Violencia e inseguridad [Violence and insecurity]*. Accessed at: <https://www.oacnudh.org/areas-de-trabajo/violencia-e-inseguridad/>

³ Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights* (Index: POL 10/8515/2025), 28 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/>, pp. 141-143.

Luzbely (LUZ) Escobar Pérez

Luz Escobar is a 48-year-old journalist and photographer with a distinguished career in the independent Cuban press. Her work documenting Cuban reality from a critical perspective and her links to activism and cultural movements have led her to face years of state repression and harassment, ultimately forcing her into exile.

Luz is the daughter of independent journalist Reynaldo Escobar, which shaped her vocation and her relationship with repression in Cuba from a very young age. Her training was closely linked to the work of Yoani Sánchez and the newspaper 14ymedio, which for Luz marked her commitment to the profession in a country where “they killed the profession of journalism,” as well as her vocation to bear witness to what is happening in the country, even with the personal and family risks that this entails.

The Penal Code, which entered into force in December 2022, regulates the crimes of “contempt” (Art. 185.1), “assault” (Art. 182.1), “resistance” (Art. 184.1), “public disorder” (Art. 263.1), “incitement to commit a crime” (Art. 268), “insulting national symbols” (Art. 269), “crimes against the constitutional order” (Art. 120.1), “sedition” (Art. 121), “propaganda against the constitutional order” (Art. 124), and “foreign funding” (Art. 143)⁴ in overly broad and ambiguous terms, thus enabling the discretionary and abusive application of these criminal offences against activists, journalists, human rights defenders and protesters simply for exercising their rights.⁵

In Cuba, almost any possibility of exercising the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly is unduly restricted or unjustly punished. The Constitution subordinates all activities related to the exercise of freedom of expression and association to achieving the ends of the “socialist society”. In this sense, Article 120.1 of the Penal Code provides that anyone who “endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning of the Cuban state and government” may be punished with between four and ten years of imprisonment. In addition, Article 143 of the Code prohibits the receipt and use of funds if it is deemed that the purpose of such funds is to “finance activities that go against the Cuban state and its constitutional order”. Anyone found guilty of possessing funds deemed to have such purposes may face a prison sentence of between four and ten years.

Human rights defenders, activists, artists and journalists carry out their work in a highly hostile environment, under which intimidation, harassment and unjust criminalization are everyday occurrences.⁶ They have been waiting years for legal and institutional changes, some of which have been repeatedly announced and then postponed, that may substantially improve this human rights situation.⁷

In addition, activists, human rights defenders, artists and journalists experience what is locally called “migratory regulation”, a state restriction preventing certain people from leaving the country. Migratory regulation and forced exile have been persistent patterns of repression aimed at silencing dissent and criticism.

It is important to highlight that the growing leadership role and relevance of women has become increasingly visible in recent years, through public awareness-raising initiatives, peaceful protests and various forms of activism (including sectors advocating for women’s rights and animal rights, as well as those working in humanitarian and legal assistance and promoting human rights).⁸

Their participation and leadership in these sectors has been marked by their experience of state repression and unjust criminalization, regardless of the type of right exercised or demanded. The

4 Cuban Penal Code 2022. https://www.parlamentocubano.gob.cu/sites/default/files/documento/2022-09/goc-2022-093_0.pdf

5 Amnesty International, *New criminal code is a chilling prospect for 2023 and beyond*, 2 December 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/cuba-el-nuevo-codigo-penal-presenta-un-panorama-aterrador-para-2023-y-anos-posteriores/>

6 Amnesty International, *Three years after the protests of 11-12 July 2021: Cuban authorities must release those unjustly imprisoned and repeal repressive laws* (AMR 25/8266/2024), 7 July 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr25/8266/2024/en/>

7 Legal provisions on the right of association and the right of peaceful assembly such as the Law on Forms of Association and a regulation on protests have been on and off the National Assembly’s legislative agenda since 2019, with no explanations being provided. For activists and human rights defenders, these could be opportunities for advocacy and attempts to achieve a right of association and peaceful assembly more in alignment with international standards.

8 <https://hypermediamagazine.com/columnistas/mejor-no-me-callos/feminizacion-de-la-protesta-mujeres-y-cambio-social-en-cuba/>

inability to engage in activism and defend human rights in Cuba safely and without fear of reprisals extends beyond traditional areas of demands regarding restrictions on civil and political rights, to include everyday issues related to access to goods and services conducive to a life of dignity without discrimination. In the case of women, repression therefore often extends beyond calls traditionally seen as “political” or critical of the country’s “political order” to target those calling for social, economic or other rights, rather than for defending an ideology or demanding civil and political rights.

Although state violence against women is part of the broader context of repression in Cuba affecting all dissidents or those perceived as such, the analysis evidences the existence of differentiated patterns of gender-based repression constituting specific forms of rights violations against women.

María Matienzo Puerto

María Matienzo is a writer, journalist, and human rights defender. She has been a prominent voice in her work defending freedom of expression, independent journalism, and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, Afro-descendants, and women and girls in Cuba.

Her journalistic work in the independent Cuban press and her links to feminist, anti-racist, and LGBTIQ+ movements, as well as cultural movements and human rights organizations such as the Colectivo Justicia 11J, made her a target of state repression. For years, she suffered arbitrary detentions, threats, surveillance, and other violations that led to her forced exile alongside her partner, also a human rights defender.

3.2. WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN AN AUTHORITARIAN CONTEXT

Gender-based violence is considered state violence when it is the authorities perpetrating such violence or failing to uphold their obligations to protect the human rights of women and girls, obligations that are internationally endorsed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁹ (CEDAW) and by the Convention of Belém do Pará.¹⁰ Gender-based violence as state violence therefore includes cases where the authorities do not adequately prevent, protect or punish violence against women by state and non-state actors, including through elimination of specialized public policies, budget cuts, discrimination and stigmatization of women and women human rights defenders, impunity for crimes against women, failure to provide guarantees of reparation and non-repetition, and the perpetuation of revictimization. It can also include ignoring the voices of collectives when repressing peaceful protest and punishing the exercise of women’s rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.¹¹

Cuba was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the CEDAW, adopted by the United Nations in 1979. This convention obliges states parties to eliminate legal discrimination, promote public and political equality, guarantee education, employment and health rights, and combat gender-based violence, among others.

However, Cuba has not signed the Belém do Pará Convention, an instrument adopted in 1994 within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS) as the first international treaty to recognize the right of women to live a life free from violence in both the public and private spheres. The Convention imposes a significant number of obligations on states and establishes that gender-based violence is understood to be that which is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs.¹²

9 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women | OHCHR

10 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women “Convention of Belém do Pará”, 9 June 1994, INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION TO PREVENT, PUNISH and ERADICATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN “CONVENTION OF BELÉM DO PARÁ”

11 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/womens-hr-gender/tool-4-analisis-es-19-march.pdf>

12 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women “Convention of Belém do Pará”, Article 2.

Yenisey Taboada Ortíz

Yenisey Taboada Ortiz, 43, is an activist renowned for her tireless work in defence of human rights, especially as the mother of Duannis León Taboada, a young man sentenced to 14 years in prison for participating in the protests of July 11, 2021, in Cuba.

Yenisey has become one of the most recognized public voices denouncing repression in Cuba, the situation in prisons, and the treatment of prisoners held for political reasons. She has faced threats, harassment, and arbitrary detentions for continuing to share audio and video recordings on social media and independent media outlets, as well as for constantly demanding the release of her son and all those imprisoned for political reasons in Cuba.

NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES

At the national level, the legal framework addressing women's rights is built on the 2019 Constitution¹³ that formally recognizes equality between men and women, and a number of laws and decrees that aim to ensure gender equality and prevent violence. These include the Family Code¹⁴ (2022) and the Code for Children, Adolescents and Youth¹⁵ approved in July 2025 and pending publication in the Official Gazette.

In addition, Presidential Decree 198/2021 approved the National Programme for the Advancement of Women¹⁶, described as a tool for developing policies that promote gender equity in health, education, employment, political participation and sexual and reproductive rights; and Agreement 9231/2021 of the Council of Ministers established the Comprehensive strategy for preventing and responding to gender-based and family violence, which includes protocols for action and support to victims.¹⁷

Despite certain legislative advances on issues of maternity care and protection, the absence of specific legislation on the prevention of violence and failure to codify femicide as a distinct crime have led to significant demands from independent civil society and women in Cuba. In November 2019, women activists submitted a request for a comprehensive law on gender-based violence to the National Assembly of People's Power (ANPP).¹⁸ The response from authorities was that potential adoption of a comprehensive law against gender violence should be considered within the framework of the legislative agenda, but to date this has not been included in the various updates of the ANPP's legislative priorities, showing a lack of official commitment to the issue. During the process for submitting the request for such law, some of the women heading the list of signatories reported intimidation by state agents and digital harassment on social media, with their private life being publicly exposed through social media posts from pages and accounts linked to State Security, which some considered an expression of a "persuasion strategy or tool for blackmail".¹⁹

Subsequently, during discussions for approval of the Penal Code in 2021–2022, the recognition and codifying of femicide faced official resistance. The government has justified its refusal to criminalize femicide on grounds that the state complies with its obligations to investigate and punish of violence against women.²⁰ This despite the increase in reports of violence and efforts to document and record

13 Cuba, Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 2019, Constitution-Cuba-2019.pdf. <https://www.parlamentocubano.gob.cu/sites/default/files/documento/2021-11/Constitucion-Cuba-2019.pdf>

14 Cuba, Family Code, 2022, Family Code. <https://www.parlamentocubano.gob.cu/codigo-de-las-familias>

15 Cuba, Code for Children, Adolescents and Youth, 2025, anteproyecto_canj_5dic2024.pdf. https://www.mined.gob.cu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/anteproyecto_canj_5dic2024.pdf

16 Cuba, Presidential Decree 198/ 2021 "National Programme for the Advancement of Women", 2021, Presidential Decree 198 of 2021 of the President of the Republic | Official Gazette. <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/decreto-presidencial-198-de-2021-de-presidente-de-la-republica>

17 Cuba, Agreement 9231/2021. "Comprehensive strategy for preventing and responding to gender-based and family violence", 2021, Agreement 9231 of 2021 of the Council of Ministers | Official Gazette. <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/acuerdo-9231-de-2021-de-consejo-de-ministros>

18 El Toque, "Ley contra la violencia de género en Cuba, la solicitud que no ha sido escuchada [Law against gender violence in Cuba, the request that has not been Heard]", 16 November 2022, <https://eltoque.com/ley-contra-la-violencia-de-genero-en-cuba-la-solicitud-que-no-ha-sido-escuchada>.

19 Race and Equality, María Matienzo, "Cubanas fuera de la Agenda 2030 [Cuban women: Left out of the 2030 Agenda]", January 2021, Mujeres_cubanas_maria_matienzo_FINAL.pdf. https://raceandequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Mujeres_cubanas_maria_matienzo_FINAL.pdf

20 Cubainformacion, 2022. Nuevo Código Penal sanciona violencia de género sin tipificar el femicidio [New Penal Code punishes gender-based violence without codifying femicide], 18 May 2022 <https://www.cubainformacion.tv/genero/20220518/97246/97246-nuevo-codigo>

cases of violence and femicide by independent civil society organizations, and the growing alarm regarding the situation of violence against women.²¹ In 2023, a group of women again submitted a request to the National Assembly for a comprehensive law against gender violence, highlighting the state's inaction in the face of increased gender violence and the need to urgently cease all criminalization of activism. This new effort was unfortunately again ignored by the ANPP.²²

Another continued demand from independent civil society relates to the absence of reliable and verifiable data on gender-based violence and femicides in the country. The absence of reliable data and lack of transparency is part of a systematic pattern of concealment of state information, which includes a refusal to document and acknowledge the scale of this national issue in Cuba. Institutional initiatives such as the creation of a Register of Violent Deaths of Women and Girls for Reasons of Gender are widely criticized due to their lack of public accessibility, transparency and availability for scrutiny by civil society or independent media. Limited judicial statistics and the criminalization of activism also contribute to a lack of transparency and absence of reliable records on the issue.

Another institutional initiative, the National Survey on Gender Equality conducted by the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) in 2022, has been criticized²³ for its lack of data on femicides, the persistence of stereotypes, lack of transparency and limitations in the methodology used, an absence of questions regarding access to justice and reparation, and its potential use for political purposes.

It should be recalled that these legal provisions and international commitments are rooted in a repressive constitutional order that restricts rights and an environment where political participation is controlled, dissent is systematically repressed and there is no judicial independence. These factors limit the scope of formally recognized rights and the possibility of enforcing them and holding the authorities accountable for their violation.

THE FEDERATION OF CUBAN WOMEN (FMC) AND THE MONOPOLY OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Women's representation in public affairs in Cuba is limited to the existence of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), one of the social and sectoral organizations recognized under Article 14 of the Constitution. In a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of association, the authorities prevent women from legally or informally establishing other organizations for working with and for the rights of women and girls, or from conducting studies to enable scrutiny and analysis of public policies and official information. Initiatives such as public policy observatories or shelters for victims of gender-based violence are often subject to harassment, threats and criminalization. The reform of the Law of Associations or the introduction of a new Law on Forms of Association has been on and off the legislative agenda since the approval of the constitutional reform in 2019. This absence of legislative review and approval is evidence of the lack of a real will on the part of the Cuban authorities to improve existing legislation on the issue.

“There is an established structure aimed specifically at silencing women. The FMC [Federation of Cuban Women] is the “female armed wing” of the Cuban regime, created for the purpose of controlling, repressing and restricting women’s rights in Cuba.”

Interview with María Matienzo, Madrid, May 2025.

penal-sanciona-violencia-de-genero-sin-tipificar-el-femicidio

21 Observatorio de Género Alas Tensas, Register of Femicides, Listado feminicidios - Ogat <https://ogatcuba.org/listado-feminicidios/> (accessed July 2025).

22 Alas Tensas, “Organizaciones de la sociedad civil entregan solicitud de Ley Integral contra la Violencia de Género en el Parlamento Cubano [Civil society organizations deliver request for a Comprehensive law against gender violence to the Cuban parliament]”, 8 December 2023, Civil society organizations deliver request for a Comprehensive Law against Gender Violence in the Cuban Parliament <https://alastensas.com/observatorio/organizaciones-de-la-sociedad-civil-entregan-solicitud-de-ley-integral-contra-la-violencia-de-genero-en-el-parlamento-cubano/>

23 El Toque, “Brechas de género en Cuba: lo que no recogen las estadísticas oficiales [Gender gaps in Cuba: what the official statistics do not say]”, 25 January 2023, Gender gaps in Cuba: what the official statistics do not say | elTOQUE.

Like all other constitutionally recognized social organizations, the FMC lacks autonomy and independence and is integrated into the state structure, as is its budget. Its leadership forms part of the Council of State, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party (the only legally recognized political party) and the National Assembly. Rather than defending human rights, the FMC's role has been limited to implementing state policies and contributing to the control and oppression of women, particularly dissidents and those who question state policies. Since its inception, the FMC has been part of the system of community control and surveillance mechanisms such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, community organizations created by the state for the purposes of surveillance, control and mobilization of the population in support of the state. The monopoly on representation assigned to the FMC as a part of the state mechanisms for repression and control means that women who join associations, protest or otherwise express their views through different channels are severely repressed.

In 2020, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) called on the Cuban state to adopt stringent measures to address violence against women, girls and adolescents. The IACHR expressed concern regarding the lack of gender-specific training for justice administration personnel, and allegations that state agents have committed crimes of violence against women, including political persecution, street harassment and sexual abuse.²⁴

In its Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Cuba of October 2024, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, while recognizing achievements and progress in the Cuban government's efforts to comply with CEDAW commitments, expressed concern regarding the "extreme responses by the State party to persons participating in street protests in relation to these circumstances and the resulting reprisals and detentions, especially since the 2019 protests".²⁵

The Committee remained concerned about: "a) The... Law on Associations (Law No. 54), which restricts the establishment of independent women's associations; b) The new provisions in the Penal Code that could pose serious threats to human rights organizations by retaining and increasing penalties for "public disorder", "resistance" and "contempt", contemplating imprisonment for "endangering the constitutional order" based on vague criteria, and criminalizing foreign funding for "activities against the State"; c) Consistent reports that non-governmental organizations continue to be charged with broadly defined offences as a form of intimidation".²⁶

Camila Lobón

Camila Lobón, 30, is a visual artist and activist. A graduate of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), she has distinguished herself through her work in illustration and graphic storytelling, as well as her staunch criticism of the Cuban government. Since 2018, she has publicly embraced her dissidence as a collaborator with the Hannah Arendt International Institute of Artivism (INSTAR), founded by Tania Bruguera. Her artistic work, which includes exhibitions in Cuba, the United States, and Europe, is characterized by an incisive look at Cuban political and social reality, addressing issues such as totalitarianism, racism, and homophobia.

Camila has been an active voice in denouncing state repression against artists and human rights defenders. She has been the victim of acts of repudiation, arbitrary detentions, and surveillance by State Security. In exile, she continues to support people imprisoned for political reasons and vulnerable individuals. Her most recent work, such as the series "Bestiario Miserable" (Miserable Bestiary), uses art to subvert the Cuban government's official narrative and project a future Cuba that is free and democratic.

²⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) *Annual Report 2020. Chapter IV.B, 2020*, <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/docs/annual/2020/Chapters/IA2020cap.4b.CU-en.pdf>

²⁵ United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Concluding Observations on the Ninth Periodic Report of Cuba, 30 October 2024, CEDAW/c/CUB/CO/9.

²⁶ United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Concluding Observations on the Ninth Periodic Report of Cuba, 30 October 2024, CEDAW/c/CUB/CO/9.

The Committee also expressed its concern at the Cuban state's denial of allegations of criminalization of women human rights defenders, as well as at the consistent reports received during the reporting period, including from other UN mechanisms and bodies, of threats, attacks, gender-based violence, stigmatization, harassment, intimidation (including online), criminalization, reprisals, arbitrary detention and imprisonment, and smear campaigns targeting women human rights defenders, including women journalists and women protesting against the prevailing precarious economic and social conditions.

SPECIFIC ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN POLITICAL DISSIDENTS OR THOSE PERCEIVED AS SUCH

“This is a state that has always been very patriarchal and macho in everything, and that, of course, includes its vision of how to treat female dissidents... much more disparaging and demeaning than when dealing with male dissidents, that is the reality”.

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, May 2025.

Women political dissidents, or those perceived as such, including journalists, activists and human rights defenders, are particularly vulnerable vis-à-vis the state and the possibility of exercising and defending their rights. In a context of systematic repression and politically motivated exclusion, these women face a differentiated form of oppression. Their families are also frequently the target of attacks and human rights violations, in particular their daughters and sons, as the authorities have decided to extend punishment for their mothers' exercise of freedom of expression and participation in public life to them.

A clear example of this are the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco), a collective of mothers and wives of dissidents imprisoned in 2003 during the Black Spring (a crackdown in which 75 political dissidents and independent journalists were unfairly imprisoned). Since their foundation, the Ladies in White have faced “acts of repudiation”,²⁷ beatings, physical violence, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, threats, harassment and criminalization. Their founder, Berta Soler, was arbitrarily detained at least four times in the second half of 2024 and spent up to 72 hours in a situation of enforced disappearance on two of these occasions.²⁸

In 2020, the organization Article 19 documented 248 attacks against women journalists and activists in Cuba^{29,30} The organization also documented that the range of attacks was greater in the case of journalists, with threats, house arrests, smear campaigns, official summons, eviction, arbitrary detention, harassment, interrogations, fines, restrictions on leaving the country and suspension of internet services.

In a 2022 study, the Cuban Alliance for Inclusion (ACI)³¹ warned of the impact on the mental health of women activists, journalists and independent artists perceived as opponents or dissidents. Internet outages and limited communications lead to isolation and limit the capacity to work of many activists and journalists. Forced evictions from their homes also have a significant impact on their lives, as many women activists, journalists and human rights defenders are evicted from their homes due to pressure from State Security on landlords. This generates anguish and uncertainty, increased physical vulnerability and negative impacts on the emotional health of the women and their families.

27 These are demonstrations organized by the authorities to show alleged community rejection or disapproval of a person considered to be against the ideals of the “revolution”, in other words, the government's ideas and policies. They usually involve demeaning remarks and intimidation, and may include physical violence, such as the throwing of stones and other objects and being pushed around.

28 Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights* (Index: POL 10/8515/2025), 28 April 2025, *The State of the World's Human Rights* : April 2025 - Amnesty International, pp. 141- 143

29 Article 19, “ARTICLE 19 documenta elevado número de agresiones contra mujeres activistas y periodistas en Cuba durante 2020 [Article 19 documents a high number of attacks against women activists and journalists in Cuba during 2020]”, 8 March 2021, ARTICLE 19 documents a high number of attacks against women activists and journalists in Cuba during 2020 – Article 19 MX-CA.

30 Note on MSI Yellow and White Griddy Big Letter Government SDG Progress Report

31 Cuban Alliance for Inclusion (ACI), “Toda violencia es política: Guía sobre violencias políticas contra las mujeres en Cuba [All violence is political: Guide on political violence against women in Cuba], 22 May 2022, The ICA presents “Guide on political violence against women in Cuba” - alastensas.com.

In its 2023 report, the Cuban Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH) highlighted the impact of state repression on women, stating that 67% of the victims of documented arbitrary detentions during the year were women.³²

In addition, women deprived of their liberty as a result of their participation in independent civil society organizations were more likely to experience acts of violence. During its 189th Period of Sessions, the IACHR received data indicating that the years 2022 and 2023 were marked by intense repression against women activists in Cuba, with measures such as isolation in punishment cells, threats and severe restrictions on communications. Added to this is the institutional gender violence exercised by the Cuban state against mothers through coercion, intimidation and threats to take away custody of their children.³³

Similarly, at a public hearing held in July 2024 during its 190th Period of Sessions, the IACHR was informed that, according to the civil society register of human rights violations in Cuba, most of the violations registered over the last 16 months had been committed against women. Specifically, 860 of the 1,577 incidents recorded in 2023 were violations of women's rights, while between January and July of 2024 women were the victims of 416 of the 702 incidents recorded, and reported being subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, intimidation and harassment by state agents.³⁴

Work centres and schools have also been the scene of repression against women journalists, activists, human rights defenders and dissidents. Organizations such as the Observatory of Academic Freedom (OLA)³⁵ have documented school sanctions, expulsions and denial of participation in academic events. There have also been reports of threats of job loss, contract suspension, "interviews" with references to their activism and labour sanctions, much of which has been documented by the IACHR.³⁶

Cuban human rights organizations and international organizations have warned for years that the Cuban state uses female agents to carry out repressive actions in an attempt to exempt or mitigate responsibility for abuses and violations.³⁷ In 2024, the organization Article 19 reported³⁸ that the persistence of patterns of repression and violence against women and their families perpetuates conditions and situations of gender inequality, and that these patterns are aggravated against women journalists, intellectuals or activists.

Carolina Barrero

Carolina Barrero, 39, is a Cuban art historian, writer, and activist. Recognized for her role in the 27N movement and the 2021 protests in Cuba, Carolina has been a constant voice in the defence of human rights and freedom of expression. Her activism began at a young age, influenced by a critical family conscience and a desire for change. In 2021, after receiving an ultimatum that implied reprisals against family members and mothers of political prisoners, she went into exile in Spain, where she continues her work as a human rights defender.

Carolina is the founder of the organization Ciudadanía y Libertad (Citizenship and Freedom), where she has promoted campaigns and conducted research on freedom of association and public advocacy. Internationally recognized, she has been a recipient of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, the Freedom Fellowship, and the Mellon Fellowship. Her activism has focused on denouncing state repression, demanding justice for those imprisoned for political reasons on July 11, and promoting citizen participation from a critical perspective.

³² Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, *Political repression in Cuba targeted women in 2023*, 16 January 2024, OCDH: Political repression in Cuba targeted women in 2023 – Cuban Observatory of Human Rights

³³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), "189th Period of Sessions", March 2024, (336) 189 Period of Sessions - YouTube, Videos 15 and 17.

³⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Annual Report 2024: Cuba, 2024*, IA2024_4B_CUB_EN, pp. 660-663.

³⁵ Observatory of Academic Freedom (OLA), Reports, Monthly Reports | OLA, (Accessed July 2025).

³⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Labor and Union Rights in Cuba, 5 April 2023, Cuba_laborrighits_En.pdf.

³⁷ <https://articulo19.org/estado-es-responsable-de-la-violencia-en-contra-de-voces-criticas-de-mujeres-en-cuba/>

³⁸ Article 19, "Estado es responsable de la violencia en contra de voces críticas de mujeres en Cuba [State is responsible for violence against critical voices of women in Cuba]", 24 June 2024, State is responsible for violence against critical voices of women in Cuba – Article 19 MX-CA.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

“We women are easy targets of the regime’s hatred because we never stop demanding that the lives of our children and husbands be respected.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025

Gender-based violence can constitute state violence when the state fails to comply with its international obligations to protect the human rights of women and girls, as established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention of Belém do Pará. This includes cases where the authorities fail to adequately prevent or punish violence, eliminate specialized public policies, cut budgets, stigmatize women and human rights defenders, allow impunity for crimes against women, deny guarantees of redress and perpetuate revictimization. It also manifests in the repression of peaceful protest and punishment for exercising rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, assembly or association.³⁹

Agents from the State Security Department, authorities and police systematically use women’s condition of motherhood to issue threats, pressure them and seek to stop their activism, media work or defence of human rights. Amnesty International received reports of threats made against women journalists, activists and the mothers and wives of individuals detained for political reasons, including summons from the Directorate for Attention to Minors of the Ministry of the Interior with threats regarding parental authority and custody of their children. In addition, the women interviewed stated that the medical history of close relatives and their children’s personal and educational details were used as a form of intimidation during detentions and interrogations, as were warning notices issued by the police or State Security alleging that the women were putting minors at risk due to their links with dissidents, opponents, activists or critical artists, or their participation in protests. The cases documented by Amnesty International also include reports of the Cuban authorities using information during interrogations that confirmed that the daughters, sons and relatives of the women interviewed had also been subjected to surveillance.

“We risk everything: institutional repression, detention, extortion, threats against our children. They dehumanize us for speaking out. As a mother, I don’t sleep thinking about how to save my child. But I also speak for all the mothers who are suffering the same fate, or worse. All the time you think that if you take one wrong step, it can cost them their lives.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025

Luz Escobar told Amnesty International that during an arrest, the police issued her with a warning for allegedly endangering her daughters by taking them to an art exhibition at the home of artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, the headquarters of the San Isidro Movement. Luz said that, of the dozens of times she had been detained, this was the only time she signed such a warning, out of fear at her daughters being involved. Luz also stated that, during her last months in Cuba before going into exile, she was summoned three times by the Department for Attention to Minors of the Zapata y C police station. She said that the authorities never accused her of anything specific, telling her that the summons were due to her daughters having problems, mentioning places where the girls played and providing educational details about them.

In addition, Amnesty International collected statements from activists and human rights defenders who reported that State Security agents had visited their children’s schools and the mothers’ workplaces to request personal information and display accusatory photographs and videos with the intention of intimidating the families and curbing the participation and public voice of these activists, journalists and defenders.

39 MESECVI. (2021). Ficha Técnica. Violencia contra las mujeres en América Latina. [Technical brief: Violence against women in Latin America]. Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI). Retrieved from <https://belemdopara.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TechnicalNote-VAWinLAC-SP.pdf>

“The treatment towards me has been crueller because I am a woman and a mother. They threaten me through my children, shout at me in public, try to use guilt as a weapon. It is a particular cruelty against women who raise their voices.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025

Threats, intimidation and the use of family and intimate information to pressure or attempt to break the family ties and intimate relationships of women activists, journalists and human rights defenders in Cuba have been part of a systematic pattern of repression perpetrated by state agents and repeatedly denounced by women. Women who are mothers of political prisoners interviewed for this report told Amnesty International how their children’s visiting rights, phone calls and access to food and medicine are violated not only as a direct means of repression against the prisoners, but also to cause their mothers pain and distress and hinder communication. The women claim that the aim of state agents with these practices is to stop women from denouncing the human rights violations that their daughters and sons are experiencing, that they “behave” and stop demanding “freedom” if they ever want to “see their daughters and sons again”.⁴⁰

For example, Yenisey Taboada told Amnesty International that her partner was summoned for questioning by the police on 29 January 2025. Although her daughters have not yet been officially summoned, they have been harassed by police officers setting up surveillance operations outside their home, and verbally threatened by officers who have told them that anything that might happen to them is their mother’s fault for being a dissident “worm” and a “counterrevolutionary working for the enemy”.

Even her two daughters, one of them an adolescent, were detained for over 12 hours on 31 January 2022 by police and State Security agents while participating in a protest⁴¹ during the trial of Duannis León Taboada, Yenisey’s son, sentenced to 14 years in prison for sedition following his participation in the protests of 11 July 2021. Yenisey told of how, after spending hours at the trial, she had to tour several police stations looking for her daughters, desperate at not knowing where they were.

“On 31 January 2022, in the context of the trial of my son and other Toyo protesters, my family was arbitrarily detained along with activist friends and reporters while waiting outside the 10 October Court. I was not arrested that day because I was inside the courtroom for the trial, but when I left I had to search for my family and plead for their release. This increased my already huge levels of stress and sadness because of what I had witnessed at the trial.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

Yenisey told Amnesty International that during their detention at the San Miguel del Padrón police station, her two daughters were forced to sign a warning notice declaring that they would no longer gather near the Court. The agents threatened her two daughters, telling them that if they continued to protest outside the courthouse or shout “freedom”, they would arrest Yenisey.

Yenisey also told Amnesty International of the emotional and psychological impacts on her adolescent daughter, who has witnessed surveillance and repression, and State Security agents shouting at her mother “you’re not a mother, you’re a worm and a counterrevolutionary”.

“The fact that you are a woman makes them want to silence you by using your own family, or even your partner, because there is this bias that women should stay quietly in the home. They also try to use our authority as mothers to make us believe that it is our children who have done something wrong or who are misbehaving in prison.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

⁴⁰ Interview with mothers of political prisoners, April 2025, Havana. / review appointment without name in manual

⁴¹ <https://www.dw.com/es/cuba-a-juicio-por-sedici%C3%B3n-33-del-11j/a-60616875-protesters>

For this report, Amnesty International documented complaints from women activists regarding arbitrary detention of their partners, threats of criminalization, use of private information, and use of social media accounts linked to State Security to post intimate conversations or photographs. Partners of women activists have confessed to having been threatened or forced to break off their relationship, or to having been pressured by State Security agents to provide information on them. Activists told Amnesty International of being approached by individuals who supposedly had a romantic interest in them but were in fact undercover State Security agents or individuals working with them. All of this with the aim of breaking the person psychologically, destroying bonds of trust and solidarity, and isolating them.

“They have publicly exposed matters that are very painful for me, such as my divorce from my former partner. They often use the term ‘old’, saying ‘she’s an old woman, they got rid of her’. That’s really striking, because it also happened to me with the police, they use the term to try to shame you, because, at your age, you should be a passive person, meek and obedient.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, 2025.

Most of the women interviewed told Amnesty International that, during interrogations, almost all of which were carried out by male State Security agents, references to their physical appearance, age and sexual orientation were common. They also said that they played with women’s condition of supposed vulnerability, always using two, three or even four male agents as standard for the arrest and interrogation of women as a tool for intimidation. Interviewees reported receiving demeaning comments about their intellectual capacity and questions about their sexual orientation.

“There was a struggle, and about seven men descended on me. They didn’t hit me, but they did try to silence me and even broke my bag. After that violent incident, the State Security agent who said his name was Luisito came up close to me, hugged me and even gave me a kiss next to my ear, against my will. The disgust I felt was indescribable. Later I thought that perhaps they were recording that moment in order to accuse me of collaborating with them at some point, or to use it for a smear campaign on official television as they usually do.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, 2025.

Although male activists and journalists also experience arbitrary detention, physical and psychological violence, unlawful surveillance, criminalization and violations of due process, the differentiated pattern of repression experienced by women at the hands of state agents such as the police and State Security officials is evidenced in their greater exposure to gender-based and sexual and psychological violence,⁴² the use of their body⁴³ and private life as tools for control, and threats and reprisals that affect their family and social roles.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Although the right to liberty of person is not absolute, international human rights norms and standards require, among other conditions, that the deprivation of liberty is not arbitrary and that it is carried out respecting the rule of law; in other words, it can only be imposed for the reasons provided by law and in accordance with the procedure established by the law.⁴⁴ The law must provide sufficient clarity to avoid its arbitrary application and must also determine what officials will be authorized to carry out arrests and when a warrant is required.⁴⁵ The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recognizes five categories that define when a detention is arbitrary:⁴⁶

42 General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. CEDAW/C/GC/35, 26 July 2017. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1305057?v=pdf>

43 The criminalization of protest and repression of women human rights activists and defenders can be understood as a means of disciplining the women’s bodies in the public space, restricting women’s political participation and their right to freedom of expression. Patterns of repression that seek to silence critical voices use women’s bodies as a target for control and punishment, affecting their physical and mental health, their ability to organize and their participation in public life. State repression intersects other forms of structural violence, such as a precarious financial situation, social stigmatization and their exclusion from spaces for political representation.

44 Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35, Article 9, Liberty and security of person, UN Doc. CCPR/C/G/35, 16 December 2014, paras 10-17.

45 Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35, Article 9, Liberty and security of person, UN Doc. CCPR/C/G/35, 16 December 2014, paras 22-23

46 United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3969534?v=pdf>

- Lack of a legal basis.
- When deprivation of liberty results from the exercise of the rights or freedoms guaranteed by articles 7, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, insofar as states parties are concerned, by articles 12, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Serious total or partial non-observance of international standards relating to the right to a fair trial established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Prolonged administrative custody without judicial review (for example, migrants and refugees).
- When the deprivation of liberty constitutes a violation of international law on grounds of discrimination based on birth, national, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, economic status, political or other opinion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other status that leads or may lead to ignoring the principle of equality of human beings.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) considers detention to be arbitrary when it occurs without a judicial order or legal basis, in a context of political and ideological persecution and with violations of due process. The IACHR highlights patterns of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in such detentions, and a lack of official information on the legal status and whereabouts of individuals.⁴⁷

Cuban legislation is ambiguous and therefore allows a wide margin of discretionality⁴⁸ that could foster abusive practices and human rights violations in the regulation of detention.

Cuba's Law of Criminal Procedure (Law 143/ 21)⁴⁹, contrary to international standards and the 2019 Constitution of the Republic itself, establishes criteria⁵⁰ according to which a person may be detained without a warrant, and the possibility that any individual may carry out an arrest under certain circumstances. It fails to regulate the process for requesting and issuing arrest warrants. The lack of certainty about when and how an individual may be detained means that arrests can occur based on speculation, rather than on facts and evidence.

“No, there were no documents, and that man made it clear to me that in my case they were never going to send me a document, and that was a policy that was followed all those years that I was an activist in Cuba... in the third interrogation he conducted, he told me: ‘No, we are never going to send you a summons because we do not want to open a dissent case on you’.”

Interview with María Matienzo, Madrid, May 2025.

Women human rights defenders told Amnesty International that they have been detained on multiple occasions, when leaving their home, in their home or on the street, with no court order of any kind or any explanation as to the reason for their detention. Some detentions can last hours or days, with no explanation or access to any judicial guarantees.

“Ever since my first experience with State Security, a trail of multiple detentions began. I honestly do not know exactly how many times I have been detained, it could be six times or seven times, or more. And yes, on three of those occasions I was physically assaulted, once by agents in civilian clothes.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, May 2025.

47 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), IACHR calls for immediate release of all political prisoners in the Americas, January 6, 2025, https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2025/006.asp

48 CUBALEX, Claridad y justicia; un análisis de las prácticas de detención en Cuba [Clarity and Justice: An analysis of detention practices in Cuba], Clarity and justice: An analysis of detention practices in Cuba - Cubalex

49 Cuba, Law of Criminal Procedure (Law 143/21), 2021, Law No. 143, of Criminal Procedure, Cuba, WIPO Lex

50 CUBALEX, Claridad y justicia; un análisis de las prácticas de detención en Cuba [Clarity and justice: An analysis of detention practices in Cuba], Clarity and justice: An analysis of detention practices in Cuba - Cubalex.

According to the complaints and statements received, many of these detentions occur on specific days identified by the victims as being related to the fight for human rights. These include 10 December, International Human Rights Day, the anniversaries of protests or historical events relevant to activism or political opposition, such as 5 August or 11 July (the anniversaries of the 1994 “Maleconazo” protest and the 2021 popular protests, respectively), and other dates traditionally used by activists for peaceful protests, such as the 18th of each month or Sundays, in the case of the Ladies in White. Berta Soler, leader of the Ladies in White, was arbitrarily detained on multiple Sundays throughout 2024, and in October of that year the organization reported that they had suffered 100 Sundays of repression since 2022.⁵¹

As another example of this pattern, journalist Luz Escobar told Amnesty International how she was arbitrarily detained on 10 December 2014. She said that she had been leaving the cinema when she saw the Ladies in White being repressed and beaten while carrying out a protest in Havana. Luz said that she had heard about these arrests and knew that the Ladies in White were beaten and violently repressed when they turned out to protest, and that they were often transferred by bus to police stations, but this was the first time she had witnessed it for herself.

It was also the first day she shared a space with other independent and foreign journalists, who were documenting the incidents. Luz stated that when she managed to get away from the protest, after gathering evidence and footage in her role as a journalist, she took a public bus. This, however, was stopped by people in civilian clothes who called out her full name and asked her to get off the bus. She realized then that they were State Security agents. She was driven in a National Revolutionary Police (PNR) patrol car by two agents dressed in civilian clothes to a nearby park where there were buses full of women – mostly Ladies in White – who had been arrested. She was never told why she was being held, nor given the opportunity to contact a lawyer. During the arrest, her phone was taken and the photos and videos of the protest being repressed were deleted. Luz believes that the main objective at that moment was that she would not be able to share any information.

Amnesty International has documented the arbitrary detention of mothers and relatives of political prisoners on trial dates, during their prison visits, or to prevent them from attending meetings with diplomatic delegations or international bodies. These detentions often last several hours, during which time the mothers are intimidated by threats to the safety and physical integrity of their sons or daughters. While being held, they are not informed of their rights, provided with legal assistance or given the opportunity to contact their relatives to let them know that they are being held.

“I think, in total, I have been arbitrarily detained three times on the street. This without counting the times I have attended summons that have been sent to my home or notified by phone... I have been stopped by State Security agents with no visible identification several times.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

Women human rights defenders told Amnesty International that these arrests are often carried out by individuals dressed in civilian clothing who present themselves using pseudonyms and show no identification. These individuals often carry out the arrests and then receive support from officers of the National Revolutionary Police or the Ministry of the Interior. They also state that official police vehicles and unmarked cars are used interchangeably for these arrests, and that support staff are often female agents.

“On another occasion we are sure that they were women who had been deprived of their liberty because of the way they behaved, and how they were being treated. And because another detainee heard one of the women say to her repressor that same day: ‘Did we do OK?’”

Interview with María Matienzo, Madrid, May 2025.

⁵¹ Cuba: Ladies in White report 100 Sundays of detentions – DW – 15/10/2024

Amnesty International has documented the arbitrary detention of mothers and relatives of people imprisoned for political reasons on occasions such as trials, visits to penitentiary centers, or to prevent them from attending meetings with diplomatic representatives or international organizations. In many cases, these detentions last several hours, during which the mothers are threatened concerning the safety and physical wellbeing of their sons and daughters. During the hours of detention, they are not informed of their rights, are not provided legal assistance, nor are they allowed to communicate with their relatives to let them know they have been detained.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a treaty to which Cuba is a party, considers “enforced disappearance” as the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by the refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such person outside the protection of the law.⁵²

In a joint statement issued in October 2024, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances recognized the seriousness of short-term enforced disappearances, establishing that they constitute enforced disappearances in the full sense of the term, even if lasting only hours or days. The declaration affirms that states have a duty to prevent and punish all forms of enforced disappearance and combat impunity. The statement also considers that in certain circumstances defined in international criminal law, enforced disappearances may constitute crimes against humanity, and that the prohibition of enforced disappearance has attained the status of a peremptory norm of international law (*ius cogens*), universally binding in all cases.⁵³

Amnesty International has received reports regarding the use of PNR patrol cars and other vehicles by police officers or the Ministry of the Interior as mobile prisons. The organization has documented cases in which state agents detain and hold people for several hours in either stationary or moving patrol vehicles to avoid creating a record of the person’s detention, evade compliance with legal formalities, and deprive the person of all legal protection and rights, such as access to a lawyer or the right to inform their family. Many victims told Amnesty International that they were later abandoned far from home or from the place of arrest, or even on roads on the outskirts of the city.

María Matienzo told Amnesty International that she and her partner experienced a consistent pattern of arbitrary detentions with short-term enforced disappearances, especially after 2019. The authorities would arrest one of them, and the other would then have to tour police stations looking for her, as part of a mechanism of intimidation to instill fear.

In the cases documented by Amnesty International, victims reported that, during these enforced disappearances, they are often locked in patrol cars in the sun with no ventilation, having to endure high temperatures that cause dizziness, nausea and heatstroke, a technique popularly known as the “oven patrol”.⁵⁴ This violates the prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. The victims also stated that they often spend hours without access to food or water, and that they are filmed or photographed without consent for subsequent exposure via posts on social media accounts that appear to be controlled by State Security agents.

The arbitrary detention of women in Cuba has a clear gender component: in addition to being unlawful, it seeks to punish women’s activism through specific intimidation tactics such as threats laced with misogynistic language and sexual violence, constant surveillance and short-term enforced

⁵² <https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>

⁵³ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/195/43/pdf/g2419543.pdf>

⁵⁴ Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression and the Press (ICLEP), *Patrulla-Horno, una tortura cubana desapercibida [Oven Patrol, a little-known Cuban torture, 5 June 2021, Oven Patrol, a little-known Cuban torture.*

disappearances. These practices, often perpetrated by agents in civilian clothing and reinforced by social stigmatization, seek to silence women through fear, and ratify the intention to do so by controlling their bodies and family life.

ARBITRARY DETENTION WITH PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

The right to life and personal integrity are rights protected by international law, initially under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequently under numerous other international and regional human rights treaties and covenants. International standards on the issue highlight the danger of excessive use of force, which can cause physical and psychological harm and ad violates the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. International norms and standards also emphasize the responsibility of states to ensure conditions of detention compatible with human dignity.⁵⁵

The Convention against Torture⁵⁶ prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including during detention, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁵⁸ protects the right to liberty and security of person. Although the use of force by state agents is permitted in certain circumstances, international standards are clear that this use of force in the context of detention can only occur in accordance with the law, and only when strictly necessary to maintain security and order within institutions or when personal safety is at risk. It must also be necessary and proportionate, since excessive use of force undermines legality and the rule of law.⁵⁹

Amnesty International has received reports regarding the use of PNR patrols and other vehicles used by police or Ministry of the Interior agents as mobile prisons. The organization has documented cases in which state agents detain and hold people for several hours in patrol cars, or drive them around the streets to prevent any record of the person being detained, evade legal formalities, and deprive the person of any legal protection or rights, such as access to a lawyer or informing their family. On many occasions, the victims told Amnesty International that they were abandoned in places far from their homes, or from where the detention occurred, or even on roads on the outskirts of the city.

“The first time [I was arbitrarily detained] I was not charged. I reported the three female agents who had caused me several injuries, including a ruptured muscle in my shoulder joint and an injury to the thumb of my left hand, to the Military Prosecutor’s Office. I have a forensic report showing that these injuries were verified using ultrasound.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, May 2025.

Many of the women interviewed for this report told Amnesty International that they suffered physical and psychological violence at the hands of state agents (including State Security agents) dressed in civilian clothing, public officials and even community members or civilian groups acting under orders of state agents, when attending peaceful protests. Some of the situations in which these women described acts of repression and state violence are described below.

REPRESSION ON 10 OCTOBER 2020

Camila Lobón, activist and visual artist, told Amnesty International that on 10 October 2020, during an event organized by State Security to disrupt a concert at the headquarters of the San Isidro

55 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (n.d.). International standards on detention. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/es/detention/international-standards-detention>

56 Ratified by Cuba in 1995.

57 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR.

58 Although Cuba signed the Covenant on 28 February 2008, the instrument has not yet been ratified.

59 United Nations. (1990). Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, Cuba. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement>.

Movement, the State Security agents tried to control the people they themselves had called to the event in order to prevent them from beating concertgoers. Camila stated that, as they were leaving the concert, the group acting with the authorities started pulling their hair and pushing them.

DETENTIONS ON 27 JANUARY 2021

On 27 January 2021, during a peaceful protest⁶⁰ involving artists perceived by the authorities as dissidents and political activists, state agents, including public officials from the Ministry of Culture, pushed, beat and forced participants into a bus that was being used as a police car or mobile prison.⁶¹ Amnesty International heard testimonies from several of the women artists who were also victims of arbitrary detention at the same protest. These women reported being pushed by men in civilian clothing, as well as by female military and police officers and public officials, beaten on arms, legs and ribs, and then forcefully thrown against the bus to make them get on. They also stated that some of the blows and violence appeared to be some type of martial arts techniques.⁶²

Camila Lobón told Amnesty International that on 27 January she had been violently detained before arriving at the Ministry of Culture. She was travelling with an independent woman journalist. Camila stated that the agents restrained her in order to take her phone and force her into the bus. While the bus was on its way to a police station, it was stopped by State Security agents and escorted to the Ministry of Culture, since Camila was on the list of people who were to have a meeting with the minister on that day.

“There were three of them, one of the women grabbed my legs, another applied a chokehold and the third tried to take my phone... At some point I couldn’t take it anymore. The screams you can hear coming from the guagua [bus] are mine, it’s me screaming, resisting the chokehold.”

Interview with Camila Lobón, New Jersey, July 2025.

The victims told Amnesty International that agents from the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) beat them over the head, elbowed them and threatened them while in the bus that was taking a number of people to the PNR station. Their belongings, including cell phones, were violently taken from them. Many of the detained women described to Amnesty International how they were pinned down by two or three female officers, who also prevented them from looking at or communicating with each other. They described the horror and helplessness they felt when they heard the screams of the other detained women, not knowing what was being done to them or where they were being taken.⁶³

Amnesty International analysed the testimonies from the victims and the press reports of that day’s repression. Both the testimonies and the press reports highlighted how public officials from the Ministry of Culture and the Federation of Cuban Women observed the violence exercised against the victims. Celia González, an activist and visual artist who was also detained in this incident, told Amnesty International that the state agents inside the bus knew that they could act with impunity, knew that they had the power to beat them and would not be punished for it, and that many of them were obviously happy to witness such acts of violence.

REPRESSION DURING THE TRIALS HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2022

Relatives of political prisoners and women human rights defenders told Amnesty International of the repression they experienced on 31 January 2022, when they tried to take civic action in a park near the courthouse where the trial of several of the participants in the 11 July 2021 protests was taking place.⁶⁴ According to their testimonies, all they wanted was to come together and support each other,

60 Norges Rodríguez, post on X, summary of the repression in @CucaCultura, 27 January 2021.

61 Hypermedia Magazine, Desamparo: Testimonio de los sucesos del 27E [Helplessness: Testimony of the events of 27E], 2 February 2021, Helplessness: Testimony of the events of 27E - Celia González.

62 RIALTA, 27 de enero: la poesía en vísperas del nacimiento [January 27: poetry on the eve of birth], 9 February 2021, January 27: poetry on the eve of birth | Rialta.

63 Alas Tensas, “Los gritos de Camila” Testimonios sobre el #27E [Camila’s screams: Testimonials from #27E], 29 January 2021, “Camila’s screams” Testimonials from #27E - alastensas.com.

64 El Estornudo, Camila Rodríguez y Justicia 11J, o cómo sobrevivir a la represión y el exilio [Camila Rodríguez and Justice 11J, or how to survive repression and exile], 26 March 2024, Camila Rodríguez and Justice 11J, or how to survive repression and exile.

but from the moment they arrived the area was surrounded by state agents, police and State Security agents. Many of the women interviewed told Amnesty International that while they hugged each other and held hands they were pushed and forced into official vehicles. They said that in the interrogations that followed the repression, the agents kept saying that “they would not allow the Ladies in White to emerge again”.

Many of the women detained told Amnesty International that while the trial was being held, the authorities threatened them with adding more years to their children’s prison sentences. Women defenders also reported intimidation by State Security agents, who told them that unless they stopped supporting the relatives of the detainees, the mothers and wives of those in prison would be charged with criminal offences.

Alina Bárbara López, an activist and intellectual, has suffered multiple arrests with physical violence. Alina told Amnesty International about several of these incidents, including that of June 2024, which she recalls as particularly violent. On that day, State Security agents stopped the car in which she and Jenny Pantoja were travelling to Havana to carry out a peaceful civic action. Both were dragged out of the car, beaten by several female officers and forced into a police vehicle. Amnesty International reviewed the medical reports attesting to the injuries sustained by Alina Barbara López.

“The arbitrary detention in June [2024] was brutal, perhaps even an assassination attempt. A female officer trained in judo, a very strong, tall, bulky woman, not only used sweeping techniques typical of the martial art on me, but also repeatedly hit me on the head and twisted my neck, as a result of which I now suffer from post-traumatic labyrinthitis that causes acute dizziness with any sudden change in posture.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, May 2025.

In addition, those interviewed by Amnesty International described receiving blows, being pushed, having their hair pulled, being restrained including with chokeholds (with what seemed martial arts techniques), receiving blows to the ribs and head, and being thrown forcefully against the ground or into buses or police vehicles, where they often continued to receive blows. Amnesty International was able to review medical reports describing the injuries sustained, which included dislocated shoulders, bruises and lacerations on hands and legs, and abdominal bruising.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Amnesty International heard testimonies describing how physical violence is often accompanied by psychological violence during these detentions. The women interviewed stated that, during their arrests, both male and female state agents constantly threatened them with false charges against them and their families, insisting that “they are nobodies, they can be manipulated, they are simply tools used by others because they are worthless.”

“The levels of violence have changed, in general intensifying over the years, but even in the best-case scenario there is violence... for example, summons are delivered by PNR officers, but when you arrive for interrogation those who are waiting for you are State Security agents, with no uniform, whose real name we don’t even know. These agents always humiliate you, they talk of false charges, they shout at me, they try to break me psychologically.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

The women told Amnesty International that their moments of greatest fear and terror at many interrogations were when state agents mentioned their families. Although they themselves always received threats of criminal proceedings and imprisonment, talk of the health and physical integrity of their relatives and reference to personal details of their partners, children or other relatives were the most difficult moments.

“I went through several interrogations with threats of imprisonment and death, as well as intimidation directed at my family and friends. Psychological violence was constant, with direct threats that sought to break my will, silence me or force me into exile.”

Interview with Carolina Barrero, Miami, July 2025.

For many of the women interviewed by Amnesty International, the so-called “acts of repudiation”⁶⁵ were one of the elements of psychological violence that most affected them. In Cuba, demonstrations organized by the authorities to evidence supposed community rejection or disapproval of a person considered to be against the “revolutionary” ideals, identified as the ideas of the government, are colloquially known as “acts of repudiation”. They usually involve demeaning remarks and intimidation and may include manifestations of physical violence such as the throwing of stones and other objects and being pushed around.

Amnesty International recorded testimonies of “acts of repudiation” carried out by neighbours, fellow workers and members of social organizations aligned with the government, including the FMC, where insults such as “gusanas” (worms), “no more worms” or “mercenaries”, as well as other more misogynistic ones such as “perras” (bitches), were shouted at women who denounced arbitrary detentions or human rights violations.

The women interviewed for this report have been targeted by a mechanism of state repression that includes physical and psychological violence during peaceful protests, assaults by state agents (including female officers) and threats to their own physical integrity and to their families. These practices seek to silence and punish women’s activism through fear, humiliation and impunity, and are reinforced by the participation of state and civil actors and the inaction of institutions such as the Federation of Cuban Women and law enforcement and judicial bodies.

UNLAWFUL SURVEILLANCE

Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) set out the basic limits of state surveillance under international law. This framework has also been strengthened by UN resolutions, regional bodies, expert opinions and other international standards.

International law generally considers⁶⁶ that any surveillance measures must be provided for by law, be strictly necessary to achieve a legitimate objective, proportionate, non-arbitrary and non-discriminatory, and always subject to oversight mechanisms, such as courts or authorities, to guarantee their legality and respect for human rights, particularly the right to privacy. These principles also apply to the digital environment,⁶⁷ including the surveillance of digital communications, the use of artificial intelligence and the collection of metadata.⁶⁸

The IACHR has repeatedly expressed concern regarding the use and impact of state surveillance on citizen security, the right to freedom of expression, and the protection of digital privacy. This international body has emphasized the need for surveillance policies to respect the right to privacy, the right to freedom of expression and association, and the right to judicial protection and due process. In its reports, it has pointed out that digital surveillance that directly interferes with privacy has a chilling effect on freedom of expression, especially when it affects journalists, human rights defenders, political dissidents or those perceived as such.⁶⁹ It has also pointed out that state surveillance cannot be used to stifle dissent or limit democratic participation.⁷⁰

65 ADN Cuba, New attempt at an act of repudiation before the headquarters of INSTAR, 22 June 2021, New attempt at an act of repudiation in front of the headquarters of INSTAR.

66 <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ior400062013en.pdf>

67 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/privacy-in-the-digital-age/international-standards>

68 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/764407/files/A_RES_68_167-EN.pdf

69 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Report on Citizen Security and Human Rights, 31 December 2009, 1.

70 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). (2023). Compendium on democratic institutions, the rule of law and human rights. Inter-American Standards. Organization of American States (OAS). Accessed at: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2023/329.asp

Amnesty International has warned that in many countries the pretext of protecting national security or combating terrorism is used to subject the population to illegal surveillance. This is done with no respect for the requirements of legality and in violation of the principles of necessity and proportionality, and without transparency mechanisms or judicial control. It has also documented the use of illegal surveillance as a pattern of repression against human rights defenders, journalists, activists and political dissidents or those perceived as such.⁷¹

The most recent regulations on this matter in Cuba are Decree 389/2019⁷² and Law 149/2022⁷³, on digital surveillance and protection of personal data. Although these show some formal advances, they also contain questionable issues in relation to international law and international standards,⁷⁴ and even contradictions between them and the regulation of the right to privacy as recognized by Article 97 of the Constitution, which allows state surveillance to violate constitutionally and legally recognized rights.

Decree No. 389⁷⁵ regulates special investigation techniques that do not require judicial authorization, including wiretapping and recording of voices, location tracking, image and video capture, interception of communications and access to computerized systems. In this way, the authorities seek to give the appearance of legality to repressive practices used against people perceived as dissidents.

Law No. 149,⁷⁶ for its part, still fails to establish effective mechanisms for challenging the unlawful use of data. It does not ensure that the use of personal details is subject to judicial oversight, nor does it sufficiently limit state access to such data.

The Cuban authorities have systematically subjected artists, academics, activists, intellectuals and other dissenting voices to alarming levels of unlawful surveillance, including in their own homes, with no legal basis. This has significantly affected their privacy, their right to freedom of movement and their ability to perform their most basic daily tasks and activities.

“Another terrible moment I went through was at the time of Tania Bruguera’s performance. That’s when, in my case, they started watching me from motor vehicles, two men in a car opposite the building where I lived. On that particular day, it was four men in a Lada,⁷⁷ dressed in civilian clothes... My neighbours told me that everyone knew I was an independent journalist.”

Interview with María Matienzo, Madrid, May 2025.

Testimonies collected by Amnesty International show that women start being monitored and followed on the streets, and receiving phone calls from unknown numbers and/or friend requests on social media from fake or suspicious accounts, from the moment they start engaging in activism or the moment they may be perceived as dissidents.

For example, Camila Lobón told Amnesty International that between 2020 and 2021 her home was under intermittent surveillance⁷⁸ for periods that could go from one or two days to a week or, in one

71 Amnesty International, “San Isidro movement and allies under frightening levels of surveillance,” 15 December 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/12/cuba-san-isidro-movement-allies-under-frightening-levels-surveillance/>.

72 Cuba, Decree 389/2019 Amending the Criminal Code, the Law on Acts of Terrorism and the Law of Criminal Procedure, Decree Law 389 of 2019 of the Council of State I Official Gazette.

73 Cuba, Law 149/ 2022, on the Protection of Personal Data, Law 149 of 2022 of the National Assembly of People’s Power I Official Gazette.

74 Decree-Law 389/2019 introduces special investigation techniques such as electronic surveillance, the interception of communications and the use of undercover agents, without establishing clear guarantees of independent judicial oversight. In addition, the ambiguity in the definition of certain offences and the possibility of retroactive application generate risks of arbitrariness and political use of the law, especially against activists and dissidents.

Law 149/2022 on the protection of personal data contains several elements that do not fully comply with international standards. Consent to data processing may be tacit, which contradicts the principle of free, informed and explicit consent. In addition, the law does not establish an independent supervisory authority, compromising impartiality in protecting rights holders. Finally, the large number of exceptions for the processing of data on grounds of “public interest” or “national security”, without precise definitions, allow for discretionary application by the state.

75 Cuba, Decree 389/2019 Amending the Criminal Code, the Law on Acts of Terrorism and the Law of Criminal Procedure, Decree Law 389 of 2019 of the Council of State I Official Gazette.

76 Cuba, Law 149/ 2022, on the Protection of Personal Data, Law 149 of 2022 of the National Assembly of People’s Power I Official Gazette.

77 A car brand commonly used by state agents.

78 Martí Noticias, “Ellos no ven tortura ni abuso en lo que hacen, pero nosotras la estamos padeciendo a cada minuto. Cuban women under house arrest!”, 28 August 2021, They do not see torture or abuse in what they do, but we suffer it every minute; Cuban women under house arrest.

incident, a total of 70 days, where the surveillance became an illegal deprivation of liberty, limiting her mobility, even for basic daily activities such as buying food.⁷⁹ Surveillance was carried out by state agents and police, and coordinated by State Security agents, always in civilian clothing. On many occasions, these agents would contact their superiors to request permission to escort her to buy food or throw out the rubbish.

Journalist Luz Escobar also reported having suffered semi-permanent surveillance at her home in 2020⁸⁰ and 2021. Luz told Amnesty International that it was always men in civilian clothing, often the same person, whom she identified as a State Security officer.

“For much of 2021, a permanent wall of police and plainclothes agents was set up at my home, keeping me under de facto house arrest 24 hours a day, without a court order. This went on for approximately ten months.”

Interview with Carolina Barrero, Miami, July 2025 .

These surveillance operations often turn into arbitrary house arrests, in which individuals are illegally deprived of their liberty and prevented from leaving their home. State Security agents may sometimes inform them in advance that they will be under surveillance and unable to leave their home. The women interviewed told Amnesty International that during these visits they were warned that the aim was to prevent them from carrying out advocacy in public spaces, and that there could therefore be consequences if they chose to leave. Although in most cases these operations are carried out by State Security agents in civilian clothes, in many cases they are supported by police officers or vehicles. The women interviewed explained that the situation changed drastically for them in 2018, when artistic movements and citizens came together to denounce the approval of Decree No. 349 that severely restricted freedom of artistic creation, followed by the emergence of the San Isidro Movement, and, crucially, after the massive protests of 11 July 2021, a moment they identify as triggering greater harassment and unlawful surveillance of their activities.

“Before 2018, they would generally warn me not to go out, not to go to such and such place, but I was not under direct surveillance, they just wanted to see what I was doing. When they realized that I would try to go out and go to the places despite the warnings, that’s when they began to put me under constant surveillance. Then it got worse, and after 11 July I was unable to leave my house for 18 days.”

Interview with Luz Escobar, Madrid, June 2025.

Amnesty International collected testimonies regarding surveillance operations set up illegally opposite the homes of woman defenders and mothers of political prisoners. Surveillance may involve a couple of individuals on motorcycles in civilian clothing, who usually end up being identifiable by those being watched, as the officers “assigned” to them by State Security. Other times surveillance may involve patrols and uniformed PNR officers or agents from the Ministry of the Interior. Very often entrance to the home is under video surveillance, monitoring who enters or leaves the house. In some cases, Amnesty International was told that state agents try to obtain video footage from inside the home, through doors or windows.

“At times, police surveillance aims to prevent me from meeting with other relatives of political prisoners or attending an event at the American embassy or other diplomatic premises. During such police surveillance, agents or uniformed police never show a warrant authorizing them to be there, nor any type of identification.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

79 Alas Tensas, Declaración de feministas y aliadas cubanes sobre violencia contra mujeres en política [Statement of Cuban Feminists and Allies on Violence against Women in Politics], 17 December 2020, Declaration of Cuban Feminists and Allies on Violence against Women in Politics - alastensas.com.

80 YUCABYTE, El precio de llamarse Luz Escobar [The Price of being Luz Escobar], 21 February 2020, The price of being Luz Escobar.

The surveillance setup varies depending on the reasons for monitoring and the person being monitored. Most surveillance occurs around significant dates or when the authorities become aware of calls to a protest or event. Surveillance often plays an intimidatory role, to prevent the person from leaving the house and taking part in the planned event.

Amnesty International also gathered testimonies from a number of women who consistently claimed to be victims of unlawful digital surveillance. Many of those interviewed said that during arbitrary detentions and interrogations their cell phones were taken and inspected by state agents, who copied their contacts and deleted photographs. The phones were sometimes returned wiped of all data and reset, at times even without the operating system.

Amnesty International has heard testimonies and analysed information that implies that data obtained illegally from the cell phones and computer equipment of women activists and human rights defenders has been used to interrogate other activists, on social media pages controlled through accounts linked to State Security,⁸¹ in public television programmes that seek to stigmatize and intimidate, and even to threaten and intimidate relatives of activists and journalists.

In this regard, María Matienzo told Amnesty International that some of the personal details and images taken from her cell phone during an interrogation were subsequently used to create fake profiles of her on dating sites and apps and on pornography and sex trafficking websites. Other women confirmed that intimate conversations and personal photographs were brought up during interrogations, with the authorities threatening to make them public if they continued with their activism.

“My personal details, photographs and audios were manipulated and used in smear campaigns on state media and related accounts. These campaigns featured distorted depictions of my habits and character, with the aim of isolating me socially and hurting my family and activist circle. The defamation was relentless and still has consequences on my intimate environment to this day.”

Interview with Carolina Barrero, Miami, July 2025.

At times, these surveillance operations have the support of neighbours or members of social organizations aligned with the state architecture (such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution or the Federation of Cuban Women). The women interviewed told Amnesty International how neighbours would sometimes record the inside of their home as they passed by, especially if they had guests, or simply stare at them or shout insults.

Unlawful surveillance by state agents against women in Cuba, particularly against women human rights defenders, journalists and activists, reinforces differentiated mechanisms of control and repression. Surveillance often has a direct impact on women’s ability to carry out their caregiving roles. Moreover, surveillance frequently goes together with sexual harassment and the use of images and videos for smear campaigns that reinforce sexist stereotypes and patriarchal structures in an authoritarian context.

The women interviewed by Amnesty International recounted how, after becoming involved in activism, they were subjected to persistent physical and digital surveillance, including surveillance of their home, being followed by plainclothes agents, and unauthorized and illegal access to their personal devices. These practices not only violate their right to privacy, but also exacerbate a repressive strategy of intimidation, restrict their mobility and discourage their political participation, disproportionately affecting their autonomy, their family life and their emotional well-being.

⁸¹ These are social media accounts, blogs or web pages known for having access to official information that is not publicly available, and the content of which is shared or cited by official media. These publications, which are sometimes shared by anonymous accounts, include recordings of interrogations and other settings in which ordinary citizens would not normally be allowed to record using electronic devices

THREATS AND STIGMATIZATION

Threats and stigmatization can constitute human rights violations⁸² when they seek to affect the life, the physical and psychological integrity and the capacity of individuals to exercise or defend human rights. When state agents exercise such actions against activists, human rights defenders, journalists and others perceived as critics or dissidents, their aim is to arbitrarily and unlawfully restrict rights and freedoms, such as the right to freedom of expression and association and the right to peaceful assembly, to create a climate of fear and self-censorship. In the case of Cuba, this has been used systematically as a tool to silence dissenting voices, restrict participation in public life, and dismantle citizen initiatives.

Women activists, human rights defenders and journalists in Cuba have endured threats and stigmatization by the authorities on a daily basis, and this has directly affected their right to physical integrity, a life free from violence, freedom of expression and association, and the right to participate in public affairs.

Amnesty International heard testimonies from women who reported receiving dozens of anonymous phone calls from “private” or “unknown” numbers. The calls were often followed by obscenely worded text messages or messages referring to private family matters. Many of these calls occurred shortly before an arbitrary detention, or on significant dates such as International Human Rights Day (10 December). In other cases, the authorities use these calls to push individuals into responding to an irregular summons for an unlawful interrogation, or simply to prove that they have personal information on the individuals concerned.

Yenisey Taboada told Amnesty International that since her son’s detention, her life and physical integrity have been under constant threat from state agents who have detained and interrogated her on separate occasions. She described how her daughters are also constantly mentioned during the arrests and interrogations, in a clear attempt to make her abandon her complaints regarding the unfair imprisonment of her son and her activism to demand his release.

“They have used my photos without my consent and mocked me on fake accounts and programmes that we know are managed by State Security... [these programmes] operate on social media with the aim of creating and sustaining a negative public opinion of activists and those who speak out against injustice.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

The women interviewed told Amnesty International that it is usual to see photos, videos and personal information that seeks to stigmatize them and discredit their activism on social media accounts associated with State Security, and even on official television programmes. It is also common to see posts referring to them as “mercenaries”, “vendepatrias” (a traitor, or somebody selling their country down the river) or “counterrevolutionaries”, seeking to encourage their communities and families to isolate them, and resulting in online threats.

Displaying this information and using such terminology on official television channels multiplies the stigmatizing impact, while also creating a climate of fear that discourages others from becoming activists or defending human rights, for fear of how it could affect their lives and the lives of their families.

Amnesty International heard several testimonies from women who talked of how, during their first interrogations they were subjected to, state agents used the names of iconic female political activists or independent civil society organizations, such as the Ladies in White, in a stigmatizing way.

⁸² UN Women, How women human rights defenders are under threat worldwide, 26 November 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/how-women-human-rights-defenders-are-under-threat-worldwide>.

“Do you want us to treat you like a dissident? Really? Do you want us to treat you like Berta Soler? I remember that they always mentioned Berta as an example.”

Interview with Luz Escobar, Madrid, May 2025.

For decades, being identified as a dissident or a voice critical of state policies meant a loss of employment and study opportunities and led to social exclusion.

One of the most common threats faced by women activists, human rights defenders and journalists is criminalization. Amnesty International has denounced⁸³ the arbitrary use of criminal law as a tool for political repression, as well as the use of ordinary crimes to punish the exercise and defence of human rights, including freedom of expression, association and protest. The threat of criminalization as a result of their activism affects not only the women themselves, but also often includes direct threats against their partners, their children and other close relatives.

“I’ve been told I can ‘show up dead’. They have threatened me and my daughters with prison, for allegedly being involved in ‘shady business’. This by State Security. And they have told my son about it, in an attempt to manipulate him, even using falsified letters to confuse him.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025.

Amnesty International learned of veiled and direct threats to the lives and physical integrity of the mothers of political prisoners and human rights defenders. The women described how, during unlawful interrogations or phone calls, state agents threatened them with potential “unfortunate accidents”, either to themselves or their families. They mentioned their young children and what would happen to them if the women were to “suffer some kind of accident that would leave them on their own”. Human rights organizations told Amnesty International that during the arrests that followed the 11 July 2021 protests, women activists were threatened with rape, and women interviewed for this report said that while they were in detention they heard state agents, police and State Security agents threatening other women detainees with rape or sexual assault. These types of threats have been reported as a common form of harassment used by the authorities when attempting to make women abandon their activism, or when trying to force them into exile.

“There were all kinds of threats in the interrogation. They told me to think very carefully about my activities and my return to Cuba, because if I returned I would be going to prison. They were clear that they would never allow me to be a journalist in Cuba. They told me that ‘they were tired, they had been far too good to us, and they had given us enough time to decide to leave the country for good’.”

Interview with María Matienzo, Madrid, May 2025.

Forced exile as a result of stigmatization, threats and harassment is a pattern that has been identified and denounced for years by human rights organizations in Cuba. Amnesty International interviewed women who had been threatened, harassed and stigmatized for years with the aim of forcing them to leave the country permanently. They have often had to face threats of detention for their activism and have tried to resist without leaving the country. Some of the women interviewed stated that the decision to leave is often taken after a violent incident or direct threats against family members or colleagues. The possibility that other activists or their children could suffer the consequences of their resistance is what usually triggers the decision to leave their country.

The women interviewed by Amnesty International for this report endured a pattern of institutionalized gender-based violence consisting of threats, constant harassment, anonymous calls, threats against their children, smear campaigns, and symbolic and sexual violence. All of which constitutes a violation of their right to physical integrity, to a life free from violence, to freedom of expression, and to

⁸³ Amnesty International, “Cuba. Three years after the protests of 11-12 July 2021: authorities must release those unjustly imprisoned and repeal repressive laws”, (AMR 25/8266/2024), 8 July 2024, Cuba. Three years after the protests of 11-12 July 2021: authorities must release those unjustly imprisoned and repeal repressive laws - Amnesty International.

participation in public affairs. It also reinforces the marginalization and social exclusion faced by those who criticize state policies in Cuba.

CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

International law protects and develops, in a number of different instruments, the right of individuals to defend human rights and to be free from persecution and reprisals for doing so. International standards and mechanisms⁸⁴ emphasize that states must not misuse the judicial system to unjustly criminalize human rights defenders. International bodies⁸⁵ and human rights organizations⁸⁶ have documented and denounced how states use unsubstantiated judicial processes, vague types of criminal offences, abusive precautionary measures and penalties of disproportionate severity to punish activism, political dissent and peaceful protest, as well as intimidation to discourage others from exercising their rights and as a tool for the closure of civic space.⁸⁷

International standards are also clear regarding the special protection that defenders must be afforded, given the relevance of their work for the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by individuals.⁸⁸

Amnesty International has for years been denouncing⁸⁹ the systematic and improper use of criminal law in Cuba as a pattern of repression and a strategy for social control.

“In July 2023, my son was told during an interrogation that I would be prosecuted for ‘shady business’ and that the charges also applied to my daughters.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, June 2025

Women human rights defenders, activists and journalists interviewed by Amnesty International described how they were threatened with criminalization and subsequently arbitrarily prosecuted by the authorities. The crimes they were charged with included “public disorder” (Art. 263.1), “contempt” (Art. 185.1), “resistance” (Art. 184.1), “assault” (Art. 182.1), “incitement to commit a crime” (Art. 268), “propaganda against the constitutional order” (Art. 124) and other offences such as usurpation of functions and economic crimes such as receiving stolen goods or undue enrichment. The Penal Code provides vague and excessively broad definitions for many of these crimes, enabling their arbitrary application for purposes of political reprisal, in contravention of international human rights standards.

“On 25 July 2025, I was taken against my will to the Guanabacoa [police] station... Rather than an arrest, it was a trap and an abduction. During the interrogation, I was told that if I returned to Combinado del Este [prison where her son is being held] they would accuse me of public disorder and incitement to commit a crime. They also threatened me with the charges of receiving and distributing money from abroad, although I only receive help from relatives and friends to support my family.”

Interview with Yenisey Taboada, Havana, July 2025.

Reforms to the Penal Code, approved in 2022, included the creation of offences to punish access to foreign funding and the holding of management positions in associations not recognized by law,

84 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Criminalization of the Work of Human Rights Defenders, 31 December 2015, <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Criminalization2016.pdf>.

85 UNESCO. (2022). The “misuse” of the judicial system to attack freedom of expression: trends, challenges and responses. Series: World trends in freedom of expression and media development. Accessed at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383832>

86 Amnesty International. (2025). How could this verdict be ‘legal’? [Report on the use of the judicial system in China to repress human rights defenders]. Accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/china-courts-used-as-tools-of-systematic-repression-against-human-rights-defenders/>

87 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). (2015). Criminalization of the work of human rights defenders. Washington D.C.: IACHR. Accessed at: <https://biblioteca.corteidh.or.cr/documento/70151>

88 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2018). International standards on the protection of human rights defenders. Retrieved from <https://oacnudh.hn/estandares-internacionales-en-materia-de-proteccion-a-defensores-y-defensoras-de-derechos-humanos/>

89 Amnesty International, “Cuba: New criminal code is a chilling prospect for 2023 and beyond”, 2 December 2022, Cuba: New criminal code is a chilling prospect for 2023 and beyond - Amnesty International.

thereby creating a broader framework for punishing and criminalizing the work of human rights defenders, in clear violation of the right of association, which includes access to funding⁹⁰ for civil society organizations.⁹¹

Independent journalist Luz Escobar told Amnesty International that during several interrogations following her arbitrary detentions, she was threatened with charges for “usurping functions”. The authorities alleged that she was not authorized to practice journalism because she was not accredited by an official institution (although such institutions only accredit government-aligned media).

Another woman activist interviewed by Amnesty International stated that she had been charged four times for public disorder, incitement to commit a crime (aggravated by conspiracy against State Security), contempt and clandestine printing. Other statements from female relatives of political detainees gave consistent accounts of their detained sons and daughters being told to stop any denunciation or activism within the prison, as this could lead to their mothers and families facing prosecution.

“I was carrying a sign with a quote from Antonio Maceo (a hero of the Cuban independence movement). When I refused to let them take it from me, they issued me with a seizure notice. I said I wanted to know what they were writing on it to take my sign from me, and they said illegal propaganda against the constitutional order. For a quote from a patriot... there are no rights, even on issues that you would think are part of the regime’s symbolically accepted history.”

Interview with Alina Bárbara López, Matanzas, May 2025.

During criminal proceedings, those charged experienced unjustified delays, limitations on access to legal assistance of their choice and excessive precautionary measures. In many cases, the proceedings were irregularly concluded, evidencing that the charges were politically motivated, with the objective being retaliation for their work.

In Cuba, the misuse of criminal law to criminalize women human rights defenders, activists and journalists includes threats of criminal prosecution for their work and using such threats to put pressure on their families, particularly their sons or daughters, creating situations of risk to discourage women from participating in public life. Vaguely defined offences that are open to arbitrary application, public stigmatization and threats of sexual violence or forced exile are strategies that seek to silence their voices, restrict their right to freedom of expression and association, and perpetuate their exclusion from civic space.

VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The right to a fair trial comprises a set of guarantees that protect the rights of every person, from the moment of their arrest or detention until they are charged with committing a crime, against any actions by the state that could constitute a violation of their rights, and ensures their access to justice.⁹² It includes compliance with the principle of legality, access to legal assistance, presumption of innocence, equality and non-discrimination, among others.⁹³

International law sets out the guarantees necessary for a fair trial in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

⁹⁰ International standards recognize the right to seek, receive, and use resources. Some of these include:

United Nations Human Rights Council, Resolution 22/6 Protecting human rights defenders, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/22/6*, 12 April 2013, para. 9(b). United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Art. 13. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Report, 24 April 2013, UN Doc. A/HRC/23/39, paras 8 and 20.

⁹¹ Amnesty International, “Cuba: New criminal code is a chilling prospect for 2023 and beyond”, 2 December 2022, Cuba: New criminal code is a chilling prospect for 2023 and beyond - Amnesty International.

⁹² Amnesty International, 2014. Fair Trial Manual - Second Edition. 9 April 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/002/2014/en/>

⁹³ 19-Las-garantias-del-debido-proceso-1.pdf

The Human Rights Committee's 2007 General Comment No. 32 emphasized the need for states to adopt specific measures guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary and protecting judges from any form of political influence. It also pointed to the need for all stages of the process to take place without undue delay, including appeals.

In addition, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has developed criteria related to due process in contexts of political repression, highlighting the need for judicial independence, access to legal counsel, the prohibition of special courts and the guarantee of public hearings.⁹⁴

Cuban legislation contains significant contradictions in relation to international standards regarding the right to a fair trial.⁹⁵ Amnesty International has for decades documented the existence of express trials, closed or private trials without legal basis, arbitrary detentions, unlawful deprivation of liberty, unlawful interrogations and the misuse of criminal law for political repression, as well as the absence of guarantees to legal counsel and judicial independence.⁹⁶

On this last issue, it is important to note that the structure of the judiciary in Cuba does not guarantee impartiality and independence. The judiciary is subordinated to the political power, and particularly to the Communist Party, and as such the judicial system has been systematically used for purposes of political repression.

Although the Cuban Constitution of 2019 formally recognizes the right to due process (articles 94 and 95), in practice the right to legal counsel is not always guaranteed, especially in proceedings against those perceived as political dissidents, where arrests without warrants and lack of access to an adequate legal defence are common.

Moreover, exercising the right to defence is further hindered because practicing as a defence lawyer requires membership of the National Organization of Collective Law Firms (ONBC), a state institution providing legal representation to citizens. Individuals requiring legal representation are therefore compelled to use the services of this state entity, which makes it even more difficult to uphold this right in cases involving individuals charged for political reasons or for exercising their human rights.

due to the discretionality, arbitrariness and impunity of state agents responsible for enforcing the law. The period for which a person may be detained without access to legal assistance may be prolonged indefinitely when there is no record of detention, or when they have not been formally charged with a crime. Even in cases involving the deprivation of liberty, individuals may be held for months or even years in pretrial detention, sometimes for longer than the maximum penalty for the offense of which they stand accused. Failure to comply with official notification formalities can also affect other stages of the process, such as the application or amendment of precautionary mea.

“They charged us, and we were supposedly under house arrest. But we never received the actual document. All the information we received was through informal channels, from the captain of State Security assigned us, who went by the name of Darío... even [information] regarding an administrative process that had expired and for which we had to pay a fine.”
Yenisey Taboada, La Habana, entrevista junio 2025.

Interview with Camila Lobón, New Jersey, July 2025.

In cases involving the women interviewed for this report, Amnesty International documented alarming patterns of delay in established procedural timeframes, a lack of access to case files and essential legal information, and an inability to access legal counsel that would guarantee a fair and impartial defence. The majority of delays occurred between the criminal investigation stage, where the alleged offences are investigated, and the point at which the Prosecutor's Office is required to formally file criminal charges. The case files reviewed show significant

94 cuadernillo12.pdf

95 United Nations. (2024). UN mandates: Cuban regime violations of due process. Prisoners Defenders. Accessed at: <https://www.prisonersdefenders.org/2024/06/03/6-mandatos-de-naciones-unidas-acusan-al-regimen-cubano-de-sus-graves-violaciones-sistemicas-al-debido-proceso-en-cuba/>

96 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr25/8266/2024/en/>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr25/6592/2023/en/>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr25/0936/2019/en/>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr25/007/2012/en/>

inconsistencies in dates and data, as well as lack of evidence. Documents often contain numerous spelling and grammatical errors, which result in a lack of clarity and cause confusion.

The women interviewed told Amnesty International that they were subjected to unlawful searches in their home, with arbitrary seizure of personal belongings such as computers, watches, money and mobile phones. These searches take place without any type of judicial process to justify the seizures, no legal warrant or notice being delivered to them, and no possibility of submitting a legal challenge against such actions. Some of the searches and seizures take place while the women are arbitrarily detained and under threat of criminal prosecution on charges such as contempt, acts against State Security, or foreign funding. Amnesty International collected testimonies from women who were forcibly taken to their home, made to collect valuables and hand them over to State Security agents, including belongings such as computers and mobile phones containing work and personal information. This also took place while their partners or colleagues remained in detention and likewise under threat of criminal prosecution.

Amnesty International similarly heard from women human rights defenders, activists and journalists who claim to have been systematically summoned for unlawful interrogations, often described by State Security agents as “conversations”. According to testimonies received, the summons delivered often lack the requirements established by law (including date, full name, reason for the summons, date and place of hearing, signature), and this formality is only complied with when requested by the individual summoned. In many of the cases documented for this report, the women described how State Security agents use ordinary police summons, and that it is only upon arriving at the indicated location that the police officers themselves acknowledge that the summons notice has been issued by State Security. The first and most common attempts at “conversation” occur during short-term detentions or over the phone.

The women interviewed for this report told Amnesty International that many of these summons for “conversations” or interrogations were arranged in a variety of locations, in addition to over the phone, including in police stations, premises known as “protocol houses”⁹⁷ or even in public spaces such as parks. According to the testimonies compiled, in many cases these unlawful interrogations are recorded by the authorities and subsequently posted on social media accounts associated with State Security, or used in programmes on public television with the purpose of stigmatizing the individual concerned.

Journalist Luz Escobar told Amnesty International that in 2018⁹⁸ she was summoned to appear at a police station in El Vedado on four consecutive days. For three of the four days she was held for five hours at the station by male agents in civilian clothing, who began interacting with her in a friendly tone which gradually turned threatening. She also said that the state agents kept insisting that she accompany them to another location to watch some videos, which she refused to do. When she again turned up at the police station on the fourth day, the police officers told her she was free to leave, as there would be no interrogation that day.

“What they wanted was to record me, in the same way they recorded all the other people who were on the news, having a friendly conversation with them. I wanted to die, five hours in which I kept saying that I wouldn’t go. Can you imagine what it’s like to spend five hours repeating the same thing to the same person?”

Interview with Luz Escobar, Madrid, May 2025.

Informal summons (meaning those not delivered in writing) for “conversations” are a covert way for State Security and other state agents to try to prevent people from reporting that they have been interrogated. These summons are usually made via text message or a phone call, they attempt to

⁹⁷ Human rights defenders, activists, political dissidents and state agents refer to premises usually controlled by State Security and used for covert detentions, interrogations and surveillance of individuals considered to be of “operational interest” as protocol or security houses. They are discrete properties, not identified as official premises, located in residential or strategic areas, and also used for coordinating covert operations, storing equipment or providing a point of contact with and for undercover agents.

⁹⁸ Luz Escobar, post on X Luz Escobar on X: “#Cuba #PrensaPresa Thank you all for your solidarity. The “interview” was full of threats from State Security to abandon the journalistic work in the digital newspaper @14ymedio #PeriodismoEnRiesgo <https://t.co/CvjNaenKaDhttps://t.co/77Xzg5Ur2u> “ /X.

convey an impression of goodwill, and those summoned are urged to agree to a supposed voluntary conversation or exchange. In the initial stages of a person becoming a subject of interest or concern to the authorities, these conversations typically occur in public spaces, such as a park or on the street.

“At the end of my first interrogation they said ‘you’re a young and educated woman, and it seems to us there’s no reason to have to summon you to a space like this, at a police station. So the next time we have any questions or concerns, we can call you and meet somewhere casual, in a café, or somewhere we can sit down and talk. We don’t have to go through this burdensome process’.”

Interview with Camila Lobón, New Jersey, July 2025.

María Matienzo told Amnesty International that, after years of subtle messages through friends and managers at her workplace, her first direct encounter with State Security agents was via an informal call. She was summoned to a public location where she met two men, one of whom tried to give her a friendly hug, telling her that she was rather naive and was being used and manipulated by other people.

A common pattern identified in the testimonies compiled by Amnesty International are the attempts by state agents to establish a personal relationship with the women being questioned in these initial interrogations or “conversations”. They appear friendly at first, encouraging a supposedly open exchange to obtain information on the activities of the person summoned and their close circle. This would seem to be an attempt to cover up and disguise an act of state repression, suggesting that the women are not victims but voluntary participants. At numerous times during these interrogations, the authorities repeatedly discredit and defame people close to the person summoned, other artists, journalists and defenders, in an attempt to break up relationships and generate distrust. Many of these “conversations” are also used to obtain video footage that is later used for implementing public discrediting, stigmatizing and defaming campaigns.

Under international law, states have an obligation to guarantee the right of all persons deprived of their liberty to be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.⁹⁹ States must also ensure that detainees and prisoners do not suffer human rights abuses or other forms of victimization due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as sexual abuse, improperly intrusive body searches, and use of derogatory language.¹⁰⁰ Body searches must be necessary, reasonable and proportionate, regulated by national law, and carried out in a manner compatible with the dignity of the person being searched by trained personnel of the same sex.¹⁰¹

Amnesty International has documented that women who have been arbitrarily detained report spending hours or even days unlawfully deprived of their liberty, without access to phone communication or legal assistance and no information on their legal status. During this time they are often subjected to practices that constitute sexual violence, including forced nudity, unnecessarily invasive body searches and verbal harassment. Women interviewed by Amnesty International described how State Security agents interrogating them made comments on their hair, their physical appearance or their body weight, and at times even openly flirted with them.

Amnesty International has heard accounts of women being forced to squat and cough for vaginal inspections, of women being confined in isolated cells or rooms with no ventilation and poor hygiene conditions, and of women being denied menstrual hygiene products. In several cases involving the detention of both men and women, Amnesty International learned that male colleagues had not been subjected to the same level of mistreatment.

99 ICCPR, Article 10; American Convention on Human Rights, Article 5; Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, Principle 1; American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, Article XXV; Principles on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas, Principle 1.

100 CAT, Concluding Observations: Egypt, UN Doc.: CAT/C/CR/29/4 (2002), para. 6(k); Recommendation CM/Rec (2010) 5, Council of Europe, Appendix, para. 1.A.4.

101 Bangkok Rules, Rules 19-21; Principles on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas, Principle XXI.

In short, the women interviewed for this report face a judicial system marked by arbitrariness, lack of procedural guarantees and institutional violence with gender, class and race biases. They reported detention without access to legal counsel, illegal searches, arbitrary seizures and informal summons disguised as “conversations”, often accompanied by intimidation, public stigmatization and symbolic or sexual violence. As mentioned above, specific demeaning treatment against women was documented, including invasive body searches and denial of menstrual hygiene products, practices that are not applied to their male peers. These practices reinforce a pattern of repression against women, built on fear, bodily control and constant threats against their family members, that deepens their exclusion from the public space and violates basic rights.

Moreover, based on the interviews and testimonies compiled for this report, Amnesty International was able to analyse and document the differential treatment afforded by State Security agents to women journalists, activists, mothers of political prisoners and human rights defenders. Such differences often stem from discrimination based on race, gender or class. Another contributing factor is the public profile of the women concerned, and thus the potential reach of their reporting. In addition, Black women from popular neighbourhoods are often treated with greater physical violence from the very start of the repression against them than women with a university education or links to the arts and culture sectors.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report shows how women human rights defenders, activists and journalists suffer human rights violations such as arbitrary detention, unlawful interrogation and surveillance, unjust criminalization and violations of due process, with an added gender-based bias. These are all part of the authoritarian practices systematically applied by the Cuban state against political opponents, dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists and artists critical of the government. The lack of judicial independence, the subordination of justice to the political system, the absence of accountability and a lack of guarantees of access to justice converge to create an environment of impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations.

The differentiated and structural pattern of gender-based violence in state repression in Cuba is explained by a combination of institutional, legal, cultural and political factors that create this hostile environment, with differentiated repressive tools being used against women who engage in activism, journalism or the defence of human rights. This pattern is neither incidental nor isolated. It is sustained and systemic and responds to a policy of social control that seeks to silence critical voices, particularly those of women who challenge the established political order. Such authoritarian practices and gender-based violence perpetuate the exclusion of women, failing to guarantee their right to participate in public life.

The repression exercised against women by state agents constitutes a form of institutional gender-based violence. Women suffer specific forms of repression, such as the deployment of male agents in operations to intimidate them, forced nudity and invasive body searches during detentions, stigmatization based on aspects of their gender and their physical appearance, and discrimination based on age and sexual orientation.

Threats against sons or daughters, surveillance in schools and summons from the Directorate for Attention to Minors constitute an additional instrumentalization of traditional gender roles to intimidate and silence women, reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes that international law and standards require to be eliminated. Afro-descendant women, single mothers, women living in poverty and women with diverse sexual orientation face aggravated forms of violence and discrimination. This would require an intersectional state response that currently does not exist, as well as a thorough and detailed analysis by the international community of the special characteristics of state repression against women from an intersectional perspective.

Defamation campaigns that directly reference the victim’s sexual life, physical appearance and intimate relationships, “acts of repudiation” using misogynistic language, and the public exposure

of personal data are all forms of symbolic and psychological violence that seek to stigmatize and delegitimize women for their activism, in violation of their human rights, including the right to a life free from violence.

The Cuban state is failing to uphold its obligations in terms of prevention, protection, punishment and eradication of gender violence, lacks specific and comprehensive legislation against gender violence and has failed to codify femicide; all of them legal omissions that perpetuate violence and impunity. State agents commit gender violence against women activists, journalists and human rights defenders. In addition, women victims of state violence do not have effective mechanisms for reporting such violence or seeking protection and reparation. The human rights violations committed against them are not duly investigated and punished by the authorities.

Moreover, the Cuban state restricts the freedom of association of women human rights defenders, activists and journalists by granting exclusive representation of women in Cuba to a single constitutionally recognized women's organization: the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). This precludes the existence of authorized and duly recognized independent groups that can report, investigate or support cases of gender-based violence and advocate for women's human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CUBAN STATE:

GENERAL

- Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- Reform the provisions of the new Penal Code that have historically been used to criminalize human rights defenders, independent journalists, activists, artists or others who criticize the authorities, wording them in a manner that is consistent with international norms and standards and, in particular, meets strict requirements of clarity, precision and predictability. The provisions in question include those on “contempt,” “public disorder” and “resistance.”
- Reform or repeal the provisions of the new Penal Code that seek to further limit the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association, such as Article 143, which prohibits the receipt of funds the purpose of which is considered to be “the financing of activities against the Cuban state and its constitutional order”, and Article 120.1, which allows for the punishment of an individual who “endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning of the Cuban state and government” with deprivation of liberty of between 4 and 10 years.
- Reform the criminal and procedural legal framework to ensure respect for the right to a fair trial, in compliance with international standards of procedural justice and due process.
- Guarantee judicial independence and the existence of independent legal counsel.
- Prohibit unlawful surveillance and establish judicial control mechanisms over any form of intervention in private life, including in the digital environment.
- Recognize and protect human rights defenders, guaranteeing their safety and their physical integrity, as well as their capacity to exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and to defend human rights, without fear of reprisals.
- Stop subjecting activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists to arbitrary detention, including de facto house arrest, imposed through unlawful surveillance and harassment.
- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, use of force, sexual harassment and violence and other

human rights violations, and include in the investigation the determination of whether torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment has been committed, with the purpose of identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice.

ON ISSUES OF GENDER

- Adopt a comprehensive law against gender-based violence that includes the criminalization of femicide, mechanisms for providing protection, care and reparation for victims, and prevention measures, in consultation with independent women's organizations.
- Guarantee the protection of women human rights defenders, journalists and activists through specific protocols that adopt an intersectional and gender and diversity-sensitive approach, recognize their work, prevent reprisals and ensure their physical and emotional integrity.
- Refrain from using motherhood and caregiving responsibilities as a tool of repression, and cease the use of threats against sons and daughters, unlawful summons from the Directorates for Attention to Minors, and surveillance in educational premises.
- Investigate and punish institutional gender-based violence, including "acts of repudiation", mistreatment, torture, physical and psychological aggressions, public defamation and sexual violence perpetrated by state agents against women who raise their voices to report human rights violations, guaranteeing justice and reparation to victims.
- Establish independent oversight mechanisms for state surveillance, particularly in digital environments, to protect the right to freedom of expression and privacy of women activists, journalists and human rights defenders.
- Recognize and address intersectional discrimination, adopting policies that respond to the specific needs of Afro-descendant women, single mothers, women living in poverty, women with diverse sexual orientation and other women in vulnerable situations.
- Reform the legal framework to guarantee women's right to freedom of association, enabling the establishment of independent civil society organizations without authorization and facilitating the legal recognition of those that may wish to be registered, so that they can exercise this right without undue restrictions, without discrimination and without fear of reprisals.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN GENERAL, AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES IN PARTICULAR:

- Maintain constant monitoring of the human rights situation in Cuba, including the situation of women activists, human rights defenders and journalists.
- Demand that the Cuban state provide full cooperation and access to human rights protection mechanisms, including visits by special rapporteurs. This involves strengthening efforts to allow visits to the country and its prisons, in accordance with the Mandela Rules, and publicly denouncing cases where access is denied.
- Provide support to independent civil society, both in Cuba and abroad, through resources, awareness-raising and protection against reprisals.
- Proactively promote support for individuals detained in the context of peaceful protests and for those reporting human rights violations who are not members of activist circles or organized civil society. This involves strengthening diplomatic efforts and providing such individuals with visibility and public support, as well as the adoption of other specific measures to support their right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

- Advocate for the creation of a comprehensive law against gender-based violence that establishes transparent and efficient institutional protection mechanisms for victims.
- Ensure that human rights reports include systematic analysis on the situation of women defenders and gender-based violence.
- Demand that victims and survivors are guaranteed access to specialized support, counselling and care services, and that the state facilitates the provision of these services and refrains from repressing and criminalizing independent civil society initiatives and groups that may provide them.
- Insist on the publication of disaggregated statistical data on gender-based violence that includes information on race and age, and press for a more transparent data collection and reporting system.
- Reiterate the state's obligation to investigate acts of violence against women and girls promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially, and ensure that the entire criminal system puts in place the necessary provisions to encourage women to report such acts, guaranteeing their protection.
- The EU and its Member States should use all channels of engagement with the Cuban government, up to the highest level, to keep the situation of women human rights defenders and gender-based violence as a priority on the joint political agenda.
- Strengthen efforts for the EU and its Member States to be able to observe trials in Cuba, and independent human rights bodies to be granted access to Cuba, including to places of detention, publicly denouncing cases where access is denied.

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic

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