

# Eviction of Evangelical Pastor and His Family

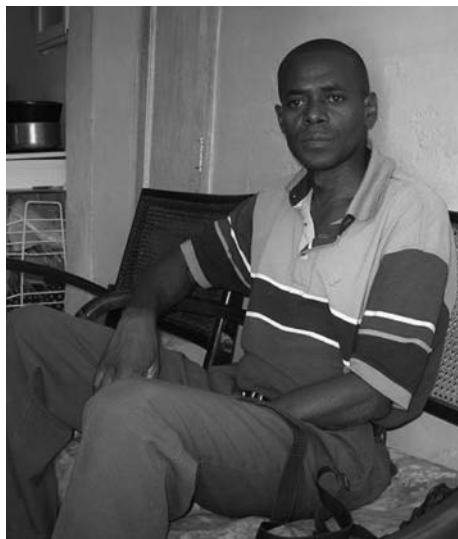
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The family of Afro-Cuban Julio Ibáñez fears it will be the victim of an “extraction,” a euphemism governmental authorities use to refer to an eviction. The family has already received an ultimatum from the Municipal Housing Authority and police stating its members abandon their home or, if not, be removed by force.

Forced evictions are an everyday practice in Cuba; the victims are generally black. What is special about the Ibáñez case is that his family’s eviction serves as an attack on freedom of religion. The Communist Party’s Municipal Headquarters cannot forgive the fact that as an evangelical pastor, Ibáñez remodeled part of his home to be a meeting room, and that in it he holds religious activities with members of his congregation.

This dispute began years ago, with an accusation that when he exchanged a home in Bahía Honda for one in Mariel, what he really did was try to hide the fact that he bought and sold them, which is prohibited in Cuba. The case went to court, and through a number of trials and appeals, after which the highest court ratified the sentence to confiscate the property, as dictated by the Provincial Court’s decision, due to “illegal transfer.”

The surprising thing is that no proof of this illegality was ever presented. All the home’s documents are in order; all the exchange transactions were carried out in



*Pastor Julio Ibáñez*

competent governmental offices. There is no evidence of bribery or fraudulent acts, only that the court assumed the act’s illegality when making its final decision.

Pastor Ibáñez is an honest, hardworking man. He has won the respect of his neighbors. His wife and children, 8 and 10 years old, are terrified by not knowing at what precise moment the police will show up to throw them out of their home. This family has nowhere to go or even return to, since their former home in Bahía Honda was not confiscated. This case serves to disprove the government’s claims about freedom of religion, the nonexistence of evictions, and the guarantee of due process.