

Acting on our conscience

A DECLARATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN CUBA

We, the undersigned, join the growing international outcry against the unjust imprisonment by Cuban authorities of Dr. DARSÍ FERRER, an internationally known Afro-Cuban civil rights leader and courageous man who for 17 days has endured a hunger strike and placed his life at risk to draw attention to the conditions of racism and racial discrimination in Cuba that has hitherto been ignored.

We support the position of the Honorable Professor ABDIAS NASCIMENTO, historical leader of the Black Movement of Brazil, and others from around the world, who are demanding Dr. Ferrer's immediate release from imprisonment. Moreover, we also support the demand that Cuba recognizes Dr. Ferrer as a political prisoner, rather than a "common criminal," as is now the case.

Dr. NASCIMENTO's joint letter to the Heads of State of Cuba and Brazil, respectively General RAÚL CASTRO RUZ and President LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA, is unequivocal. He requests that Cuba's President intervene to stop the unwarranted and brutal harassment of black citizens in Cuba who are defending their civil rights. Similarly, he requests that Brazil's President immediately prevail on the Cuban government to safeguard the rights of Cuba's most oppressed citizens who, in this case, happen to be more than 62% of the total population.

Professor NASCIMENTO has been a long standing supporter of the Cuban Revolution and government, but he, like we, cannot be silent in the face of increased violations of civil and human rights for those black activists in Cuba who dare raise their voices against the

island's racial system. As of late, these isolated, courageous civil rights advocates have been subject to unprovoked violence, State intimidation and imprisonment.

As African Americans, we know firsthand the experiences and consequences of denying civil freedoms on the basis of race, and we certainly understand what racial discrimination is and does to people. We have not tolerated it for ourselves, and will certainly not acquiesce in its perpetration against any other people. For that reason, we are even more obligated to voice our opinion on what is happening to our Cuban brethren a few miles away.

We support Cuba's right to enjoy national sovereignty, and unhesitatingly repudiate any attempt at curtailing such a right. However, at this historic juncture, we also do believe that we cannot sit idly by and allow for decent, peaceful, and dedicated civil rights activists in Cuba, and the black population as a whole, to be treated with callous disregard for their rights as citizens and as the most marginalized people on the island.

Racism in Cuba, and anywhere else in the world is unacceptable and must be confronted!

We call on the authorities and Government of Cuba to immediately and unconditionally free our brother, Dr. Darsi Ferrer.

30 November 2009

Signatories

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