

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2025

Dear Secretary Rubio,

I write to request your urgent attention to the cases of Cuban political prisoners Maykel “Osorbo” Castillo Pérez and Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, both of whom I sponsor as part of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission’s Defending Freedoms Project.

As you know, on July 11, 2021, tens of thousands of Cubans took to the streets in solidarity to demand justice, opportunity, and freedom from the brutal communist dictatorship that exists on the island. The Cuban regime responded by doubling down on totalitarian oppression with an unprecedented crackdown on dissent. This included illegally imprisoning over 1,800 Cubans, the majority of whom were young and Afro-Cuban.

The United States has long supported the Cuban people’s dream of a free and democratic future, and July 11 was no exception. I am proud to have introduced H.Res.760, which expressed solidarity with Cuban citizens demonstrating peacefully for fundamental freedoms and condemned the regime’s acts of repression. Overwhelming bipartisan approval of this measure sent a powerful message that the United States will not stand silent in the face of injustice.

Four years later, activists like Maykel “Osorbo” Castillo, co-author of Cuban protest anthem “Patria y Vida”, and Luis Manuel Otero, a visual artist and leader in the anti-censorship San Isidro Movement, have been jailed by the regime along with dozens of others who spoke up against tyranny. Amnesty International has designated both men as prisoners of conscience and the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that both of their detentions violate international law and called for their immediate release.

Maykel Castillo, a two-time Latin Grammy winning rapper, was captured by Cuban secret police two months before the July 11 demonstrations and has been imprisoned in the maximum-security Pinar del Rio prison ever since. He has been subjected to violence, torture, 24-hour surveillance, solitary confinement, and suspension of visits and contact with his family. Six months into his nine-year sentence, he suffered a failure of his lymphatic system and has experienced severe symptoms. In addition, the prison has consistently refused to release Maykel’s medical records to his family. On the two-year anniversary of the July 11 mobilization, to protest his imprisonment and constant interrogations by regime officials, Maykel sewed his mouth shut and tattooed “Patria y Vida” on his arm.

Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, a self-taught Afro-Cuban artist and activist named an “icon” by Time magazine for his advocacy, was arrested by regime forces on July 11th and detained at Guanajay maximum-security prison where he has been imprisoned to this day. After a trial conducted behind closed doors, Amnesty International cited his five-year sentence as “emblematic... of how [Cuba’s regime] uses the judicial system to criminalize critical voices.” Luis Manuel is also in declining health. The artist has a dislocated knee, problems with one of his eyes, and circulatory problems. He has been subjected to solitary confinement and lost a great deal of weight. In a letter published by the Miami Herald, Luis Manuel noted the “regime that has survived for 64 years... is once again trying to crush a generation... every young Cuban is a political prisoner.”

In early 2025, the Cuban regime purportedly released 553 prisoners, including a few political prisoners, as part of a Vatican-brokered deal. However, the released political prisoners are still not free – rather, they are required to comply with burdensome conditions, including travel restrictions, forced labor, and a prohibition on activism and public statements. Almost all of those released were already entitled to release under Cuban law before this

process. Third, the regime continues to arbitrarily detain and imprison new political prisoners; in fact, many of those released have been rearrested, including pro-democracy activists José Daniel Ferrer García and Félix Navarro Rodríguez. There are still over 1,000 political prisoners in Cuba who are either imprisoned or under severe restrictions such as house arrest.

The Cuban regime has no plans to release Maykel and Luis Manuel, and I have no confidence that rewarding the Cuban dictatorship will significantly improve its despicable record or improve the conditions of ordinary Cubans. Therefore, I request that the Administration take immediate action to push for their release.

First, when State Department officials next engage in migration talks with the Cuban regime, I urge you to instruct them to prioritize the immediate, unconditional release of Maykel and Luis Manuel and to commit to strict punitive measures against regime officials if they are not freed.

Second, I ask that you direct the U.S. representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to elevate and support cases brought by victims of the Cuban regime, including the Petition for Immediate Relief filed on behalf of 42 imprisoned dissidents by the Cuban American Bar Association on November 17, 2021.

Third, following your prior engagement with the European Union on Cuba, I request that the U.S. mission to the European Union work with other E.U. missions to ensure that the unconditional release of political prisoners is included in the discussions relating to the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement.

Finally, as Maykel and Luis Manuel's sponsor and principal advocate in Congress, I encourage you to join me in raising public awareness of the Cuban regime's treatment of them and hundreds of other pro-democracy activists to ensure that their sacrifice on behalf of Patria y Vida – fatherland and life – was not made in vain.

Sincerely,



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Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress