

Cuba's False Prophets Predict Worldwide Unrest in 2016

Priests offering New Year's prophecies from Cuba's Afro-Cuban religion forecast an explosion in migration and social unrest worldwide in 2016.

Many on the Caribbean island eagerly wait for guidance from the Santeria religion's annual forecast. Santeria, with roots in West African tradition brought to Cuba by slaves, is practiced by millions of Cubans.

This year, the island's official association of priests, known as babalawos, predicted an "explosion" of migration and "social unrest provoked by desperation."

The yearly reading is for Cuba and the world at large, but the babalawos did not state which predictions, if any, apply to Cuba specifically.

"The predictions of Ifa (divination system) warn world leaders that if no action is taken, we may lead our people to a massive migration provoked by different things, desperation among them," priest Lazaro Cuesta told a news conference in Havana.

The flow of migrants from the Communist-ruled island jumped by about 80 percent last year as the process of detente between Washington and Havana, announced in December 2014, stirred fears that preferential U.S. asylum rights for Cubans may soon end.

Cuesta said war, economic hardship, political conflict and terrorism are sparking worldwide migration.

He did not give specifics about the priests' social unrest prediction, but offered a metaphor: "When you are in your room

and it's really hot, desperation makes you run out of the room. If we give you an air conditioner, you stay put."

"I can be living in a hot room and I don't leave running because it's my room," Cuesta said. "I'm living alongside everyone else in Cuba, and I'm not leaving."

Based on this year's forecast, the babalawos recommend "establishing favorable accords with respect to migration policy," and "reaching a balance between salaries and the high cost of basic necessities."

Earlier this week, Cuban President Raul Castro told the National Assembly, the country's single-chamber parliament, that an economic slowdown is expected in 2016. Food prices have increased more than 50 percent on the island over the last four years, according to official media. The average salary throughout the island is less than \$30 a month.

"A person who economically considers himself incapable of living in the place where he is is going to look for a better future somewhere else," said Cuesta.

The priests also prophesied that 2016 would bring greater foreign investment and accords between nations, but gave no further details. {eoa}

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