

Holy Week Hijacked: Communist Regime Targets Christians

For the second year in a row, Cuban authorities have blocked Christians from celebrating a key Holy Week tradition. The Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Havana was denied permission to hold its Palm Sunday procession, a public act of faith that marks the beginning of Holy Week in the Christian calendar.

Father Lester Rafael Zayas Díaz, the parish priest in the Vedado district of Havana, informed the congregation that the government did not authorize the Solemn Stations of the Cross procession. "We hereby inform that the Solemn Stations of the Cross announced and prepared by the Vicariate for tomorrow Palm Sunday at 6:00 p.m. from Linea to Lateran has been suspended because the authorities have not approved it," Díaz stated.

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This marks a troubling continuation of restrictions on Christian worship in Cuba. In 2023 and again in 2024, the government blocked the same Palm Sunday procession from taking place. While private worship remains technically legal, public expressions of faith are subject to strict regulation and are often curtailed by the communist regime.

Díaz spoke out in 2024, claiming the government wrongfully denied members of faith from celebrating Holy Week. "To deny it as a punishment to a parish priest is, besides absurd, a violation of religious freedom. The parish priest is only the spokesman of the people's desire. He is the one who requests it to the competent authority, but it is not his personal desire," Díaz asserted in 2024.

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The Cuban constitution theoretically guarantees freedom of religion. However, in practice, the government retains tight control over religious gatherings, especially those that involve public demonstrations or marches. Church leaders and Christian activists have repeatedly voiced concerns that these policies are being used to suppress religious influence in public life.

Cuba's communist government has a long history of controlling and limiting religious expression. Though relations between the state and the church have improved slightly since the 1990s, many Christian communities—particularly those seen as politically independent—continue to face obstacles. These include denial of building permits, surveillance and censorship.

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Religious freedom watchdogs have cited Cuba as one of the countries where believers often face subtle but persistent persecution. Christian leaders in the country have warned that the restrictions on public processions, especially during Holy Week, are not isolated incidents but part of a broader campaign to limit faith-based influence in Cuban society.

The cancellation of the Palm Sunday event is another signal that the Cuban government remains unwilling to allow full religious liberty. With Holy Week central to the Christian faith, preventing its public observance is a clear affront to religious freedom and a reminder of the enduring challenges believers face under authoritarian rule.

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