

Pastor Attacked, Church Shuttered in Havana Province

The Full Gospel Church was forcibly closed in Havana Province at the end of February, leaving more than 200 people without a place of worship. A week before the church closure, the pastor of the church, Jesus Hernandez, was attacked by an armed mob as he was sleeping in his home.

State security agents shut down and sealed the doors of the Full Gospel Church in the Lotería neighborhood in the municipality of Cotorro in the last days of February, confiscating all of the church's belongings, including chairs and musical instruments.

According to Caridad Diego, the head of the Cuban Communist Party Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), which oversees all religious activity in Cuba, the church and everything inside were confiscated because of a dispute over ownership of the church. This account is contradicted however, by members of the church, who told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that the church has existed in its present location for more than 15 years, led by the same pastor, and without problems.

The forced closure and confiscation of church property followed a disturbing mob attack on the home of Pastor Hernandez at 2 a.m. while he was asleep inside. According to witnesses, the people in the mob were carrying sticks, baseball bats and also threatened his teenage son. After the attack and the confiscation of the church building, Pastor Hernandez and other church leaders attempted to resolve the problem in a meeting with Caridad Diego and other officials at ORA, which proved futile.

Church leaders believe that the church was targeted because of its consistent and rapid growth and because of the pastor's

friendship with leaders of the **Apostolic Movement**, a rapidly expanding network of Charismatic churches that the government has refused to allow to register, and which the authorities have openly and aggressively worked to destroy in recent years. While the church is not affiliated with the Apostolic Movement, Pastor Hernandez maintains a good relationship with its leadership.

“CSW is deeply concerned by the attack on Pastor Hernandez’ home and the threats against his son,” CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said. “The closure of the Full Gospel Church and the confiscation of church property is just one more example of the regular abuse of power committed by Caridad Diego and the ORA.

“Official declarations of respect for **religious freedom** must be backed up by action, and CSW reiterates its call for the Cuban government to remove authority for all religious activity from ORA and to deal with these matters through regular legal channels, which offer recourse for appeal. We urge the Cuban government to return the church and the property inside to the members of the Full Gospel Church without delay.”