

18 June 2020

Cuba: Arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, physical assaults and surveillance of Luis Manuel Otero, Maykel Castillo and Anamely Ramos

On 11 June 2020, human rights defenders **Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara** and **Maykel Castillo Perez**, were detained and physically attacked by members of the National Revolutionary Police, outside the house of Maykel Castillo Perez in Havana. The defenders were released the following day. On 17 June, the two defenders were detained again along with the human rights defender **Anamely Ramos González** and **Claudia Genlui**, Luis Manuel Otero's partner, whilst on their way to file a complaint against the police violence during their detention on 11 June. The defenders were released on the evening of 17 June and information regarding further charges against them is not yet known.

[Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara](#) is a visual artist and human rights defender from Cuba. He is the general coordinator of the [San Isidro Movement](#), a group of artists formed in 2018 to promote freedom of expression and cultural rights in light of the restrictions brought by the [Decree 349](#). The Decree allows the Cuban government to control cultural and artistic productions and restricts the right to artistic freedom for artists. [Maykel Castillo Perez](#) is a rap music artist and a defender of the right to artistic freedom. He is also involved with the San Isidro movement and was one of the main promoters of the movement's campaign [#NoAlDecreto349](#). Better known by his music alias "El Osorbo", his music is critical of the Cuban government and the poverty in some neighbourhoods in Havana. [Anamely Ramos González](#) is an artist and a defender of cultural rights in Cuba. She formerly worked as a professor and researcher at the University of the Arts (ISA), but currently focuses on the subject of historical memory and censorship in Cuba. Anamely Ramos has also been a leading figure in the ['SIN 349'](#) campaign against Decreto 349, which promotes freedom of expression and artistic creation.

On 11 June, the defenders had been with six other activists in Maykel Castillo Perez's house for the evening, and as they were all leaving at about 11pm, a passing police patrol car stopped and the officers arrested Maykel Castillo Perez as he was not wearing a protective face mask. The defender had temporarily removed the mask to eat during the evening, which the other defenders told the police, in protesting his arrest. Along with the other activists [filming the incident](#), Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara was documenting the arrest on his phone, which then resulted in his arrest too. Neither of the defenders resisted arrest with physical force.

As the patrol car arrived at the Cuba and Chacón police station, Maykel Castillo Perez said to the police, 'this is racism, down with the dictatorship', to which the police responded violently, dragging the defenders from the car onto the pavement and hitting them with batons. Approximately eight police officers from the station joined the attack and the two defenders were assaulted for several minutes, causing serious injuries. They were then transferred to cells in the police station and denied medial attention, until 6am the following morning. They were denied copies of the medical report. The defenders were released an

hour later and were denied their right to file a complaint for inappropriate police conduct. Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Maykel Castillo Perez were charged with contempt, public disorder and damage in relation to their detention on 11 June.

After the two defenders had been arrested by police on 11 June, Anamely Ramos González, who had been present during the arrest, went to the Cuba and Chacón police station to inquire about the detained defenders. Her entry was allowed at the main entrance of the police station, however whilst walking by the main hall of the station she was intercepted and physically assaulted by a female officer who told her that she did not have permission to enter. Moments later, other police officers arrived and hit her on the ground, causing deep wounds to her upper lip and torso. The defender was detained for an hour following this attack and then released, [recounting the incident](#) on social media afterwards.

On 17 June 2020, defenders Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Maykel Castillo Perez, Anamely Ramos González and Claudia Genlui were arrested whilst they were leaving their homes separately to go to the Cuba and Chacón police station to file a complaint about the police officer's use of violence on 11 June. They were each detained in separate prisons in Havana and were told they were arrested with regard to their intentions to file a complaint, stating they were going to 'initiate provocation'. They believe they were being monitored by police, as the police had known of their whereabouts and their intentions to report the violence, which Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara had [posted](#) on Facebook that morning. They were eventually released on the evening of 17 June.

Other members of the San Isidro movement have faced threats from the police since the detention of the defenders. Human rights defender and member of the movement [Michel Matos](#) was warned by police officers who monitor his home "we are not going to accept any provocation" referring to the intent to complain about the police brutality. In addition, the officers threatened the defender, saying "if you leave your house, we will arrest you." Prior to being arrested on 17 June, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and other members of the San Isidro Movement documented incidents of [surveillance](#) by the police near their homes on social media, fearing their arrest.

Both Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Maykel Castillo Perez have previously been targeted by police for their human rights work. On 1 March 2020, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara was arbitrarily detained and accused of aggravated contempt of State leadership, desecration of national symbols, damage to property, and outrage against national symbols. During the arrest the defender was also subjected to ill-treatment by members of the National Revolutionary Police, along with Claudia Genlui, who was trying to document the arrest on her phone. The trial on these fabricated charges, was rescheduled in the context of COVID-19. The protests against Decree 349 have resulted in many arbitrary detentions of human rights defenders, the detention usually lasting several days, and fabricated charges brought against them, the most common charge being 'property damage'.

In April 2018, Maykel Castillo Perez was sentenced to one year in prison by the Municipal Court of Old Havana for 'contempt', days after he held a concert in La Madriguera, the headquarters of the [Association Hermanos Saíz \(AHS\)](#), during which he and other artists spoke out against Decree 349. After spending two months in Valle Grande prison in

Havana, the defender sewed his mouth together to demand his immediate release. He was eventually released in October 2019, following a campaign by the San Isidro Movement for his release.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the surveillance, police violence, fabricated charges and arbitrary detentions of and against Maykel Castillo Perez, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, his partner Claudia Genlui and Anamely Ramos González. It believes that these actions taken by authorities are part of a comprehensive strategy to intimidate and repress those who defend the right to freedom of artistic expression and protest Decree 349, which grants the government control over artistic expression. Front Line Defenders believes that the violence and judicial harassment against them is in direct reprisal for their peaceful activities which promote freedom of expression and cultural rights in Cuba.

Front Line Defenders urges the Cuban authorities to:

1. Drop all charges against Maykel Castillo Perez and Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, as they are believed to be solely motivated by their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into the physical assaults of Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Maykel Castillo and Anamely Ramos González, with the view to publishing the results and bring those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards;
3. Cease surveillance and police violence against members of the San Isidro Movement and take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and safety of Maykel Castillo Perez, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Anamely Ramos González and Claudia Genlui;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Cuba, particularly those who defend freedom of expression in the context of Decree 349, can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, including arbitrary detention and judicial harassment.