

Statement by Susana Alvarez Pruneda  
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Just a few days before boarding my flight to Poland, I learned very distressing news from my mother in Cuba. She told me that state security officers came to my father's prison cell. Their message was loud and clear: if I, his daughter, were to come to Poland and speak to you, his prison term of 25 years would be elongated to the maximum penalty. My father is a brave man. And through his bravery and with his blessing, he gave me strength to come here today and ask for your help.

I would like to start by thanking the conference organizers for the opportunity to speak at this incredibly historic moment about the conditions facing independent labor unionists in Cuba, particularly that of my father, Pedro Pablo Alvarez, the Secretary General of the United Council of Cuban Workers (CUTC).

The Cuban government is a signatory of all major international conventions regarding labor rights. Yet, it violates these standards and actively works against the development of an alternative for Cuban workers, in complete violation of its own laws on labor standards.

The Cuban Workers Committee (CTC) is the only official union and only militant party members who actively take part in state organized acts of public humiliation against dissidents, or mandatory marches, and other party functions are promoted to higher positions. Laborers cannot bring up disputes against the CTC. Furthermore, foreign investors can only hire workers through the CTC, which retains from 85 to 90% of the wages charged - dispersing an \$8 to 12 a month salary to the workingman and woman. All workers in the state must belong to the CTC.

We the independent labor union members of Cuba, solely demand that our right to peacefully coexist, without confrontation, be agreed to by Cuban authorities. Yet, in March 2003 7 independent labor union leaders were arbitrarily arrested, tried and convicted for merely exercising their individual and collective right to freedom of expression, association, and thought. When the magistrate sentenced my father to 25 years in jail, he and all other executors of the arbitrarily created legal system in Cuba demonstrated not only their little regard for basic human rights, but their jealousy for the bravery and freedom of conscience my father enjoys daily, despite his jail cell.

But who is my father to under go all this? A 57 year old man with a slow pace and a warm personality. A skilled ironworker who was relegated to being a janitor for lack of party loyalty. What was the horrendous crime that he committed to deserve such a long sentence? He a workingman. A man who never even raised the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but rather defended the working class from the violations the state committed based on its own laws. Is this why he should remain a quarter of a century in jail, a year of which he has already served in complete isolation?

It was very difficult for me to leave him behind in these conditions. I visited him for the last time, when he urged me to leave and save my child so that he did not grow up with hate and being taught that his grandfather was a mercenary and a scum.

Despite my going to visit my father for the last time with my four year old son, the guards made us walk through the jail and we sat with him in a 3 by 6 foot cell that smelled, was dark, hot and had little if any ventilation surrounded by other cells filled with prisoners.

My innocent little boy pleaded with the guard to not lock the door that he didn't want to be in jail. These are the humiliating things they do to prisoners of conscience before te eyes of their families. I hate to imagine they torture they inflict on them behind closed doors. As we left, we told them that the world would one day know of their ways. That guard dared us, saying that no one would believe us.

I'm here to tell you that story, to deliver that message. I'm here to tell you that when you look at Cuba do not see the touristy Cuba, see the suffering Cuba, the Cuba that has been destroyed, the Cuba that carries inside her 75 valiant men like my father.

It is truly inspiring to come to Poland and speak about my father and his colleagues within the independent labor unions of Cuba. Your movement gives them hope. These are brave individuals who will struggle endlessly. 25 years ago at Gate No. 2 the phrase "To want to is to be able to." The men and women of Cuba are very brave, and I assure you that THEY want to, and with your Solidarity they WILL BE ABLE to.