

HRC46 | In Cuba, reading poems can land you in jail

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Cuban activist and academic Anamely Ramos describes the repression she and other cultural rights defenders face and - to coincide with the report of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights to the Human Rights Council - calls for the right to freedom of expression and for artistic freedom to be respected.



[Versión en español](#)

Activist and academic Anamely Ramos, member of the San Isidro Movement of artists, speaks out about the threats and attacks carried out against cultural defenders in Cuba.

Ramos was detained during a raid on the Movement's headquarters in November 2020 and held incommunicado. Authorities claimed the raid related to violations of supposed regulations related to COVID-19. Ramos had previously spoken out against the proposed Decree 349 that required artists to get a permit from the Cuban ministry of culture if they wanted to perform in public or private spaces. It is feared its effect would be to silence and curb the activities of artists and activists.

Anamely's full statement:

My name is Anamely Ramos González. I am one of the 14 Cuban activists who were quartered in November 2020, at the headquarters of the San Isidro Movement, some of us on hunger and thirst. On the night of the 26th of that month, soldiers dressed as doctors forcibly imprisoned us, alleging the spread of the coronavirus. We were beaten, disappeared for several hours and sentenced to house arrest. Our only 'crime': reading poetry to demand the freedom of rapper Denis Solís, victim of arbitrary detention.

Hours later, more than 200 young people voluntarily gathered in front of the Ministry of Culture to demand an end to censorship. Press images show the police siege and the use of tear gas. On 27th January 2021 several returned to congregate in front of the Ministry, and they were beaten once again violently even as they were reading poems aloud. This time this occurred in front of officials of the Ministry of Culture.

In order to promote cultural rights in Cuba, it would be necessary to guarantee that all its citizens have the right to express themselves freely about their lives, their environment, and their dreams for change, without that resulting in persecution, defamation campaigns, acts of repudiation, beatings, prohibition of movement, arbitrary arrests and prison sentences.

So far, the cultural policy of the Cuban State does not recognize independent artistic organizations. Nor those that fight for the rights of minorities or those who fight for the respect of human rights. It acts as if official institutions are sole representatives of Cuban culture, and at times employs them for repression. Decree laws 349 and 370 criminalize dissent and criticism.

The Cuban State must recognize our right to associate freely and to assemble peacefully, and should extend an invitation to the country to the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and she should meet with genuinely independent activists.

UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights' words:

Anamely's message is delivered to coincide with the presentation of the report by the UN independent expert on cultural rights, Karima Bennouna, focusing on the effect of Covid19 on cultural rights. Here, Bennouna spoke of how Covid19 measures were being employed to 'criminalise artists with dissenting views'. The detention of artists could act as a 'defacto death sentence' given the presence of the virus in detention centres. Bennouna concluded her dialogue with States by emphasising the positive potential of cultures and cultural rights to enhance rights-respecting solutions and build resilience.

ISHR was pleased to join other human rights and cultural organisations in presenting [a statement](#) in support of the Special Rapporteur's work.

'The statement we joined ends with a clear message,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw. 'Cultural freedom is not a luxury; instead, it needs to be at the heart of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic'

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Photo: Screenshot from the statement video

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