

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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BQ 478 – No. 17/2017

The International Society for Human Rights thanks the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Cuba for its Great Courage

(Bonn, 29.06.2017) The president of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) has thanked the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Cuba for demonstrating increasing courage in issues relating to human rights and that he has met with the 'Ladies in White'.

The chairman of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, Juan de la Caridad García Rodríguez, Archbishop of San Cristóbal de la Habana, met with the chairperson of the Ladies in White (Las Damas de Blanco), Berta Soler, not only as the first bishop to do so but also as the first important personality in Cuba to do so. At the same time, he also stated that secret agents who have spied on the Ladies in White would be excommunicated and excluded from mass if there identities were found out.

Las Damas de Blanco was founded in 2003 by relatives, primarily mothers, of 79 incarcerated regime critic. On Sundays they leave worship service at Santa Rita de Casia in Havanna dressed in white and go quietly along Quinta Avenida, a major street in the capital.



In discussion with Juan de la Caridad García Rodríguez, Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Cristóbal de la Habana and chairman of the Bishops' Conference © BQ / Martin Warnecke



"Ladies in White" © IGF



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The detainees were released in 2011 on probation, and most of them immediately left Cuba. The Ladies in White, however, have continued to fight for other detainees and for the observance of human rights in general. Prior to the Pope's visit in 2012, 30 of the Ladies in White were temporarily detained. Prior to the visit by President Barak Obama in 2016, 50 of the Ladies in White were temporarily detained. Officially, there are 82 women in Havana who belong to the Ladies in White, and in the eastern part of the country there are 34. The Ladies in White have been honored with many awards from around the world. For instance, in 2006 they were honored with the Sakhariv Prize by the EU Parliament.

In addition, Schirmmacher met with the head of the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, Lic. Caridad Diego Bello, and two of her staff members.

René Gómez Manzano

According to Schirmmacher, a particular high point was visiting René Gómez Manzano, the chairman of the Cuban section of the ISHR, the chairman of an association of human rights lawyers, and someone massively supported by the Vatican and by Amnesty International during his periods of incarceration. He is also the recipient of numerous human rights awards. "What I find to be most impressive," according to Schirmmacher, "is that again and again



Thomas Schirmmacher and René Gómez Manzano in Havana
© BQ / Martin Warnecke

Gómez has spent long periods of time in prison and has nevertheless rejected the opportunity to leave the country. He did this in order to not abandon others and because this is the only way he can bring about change." Schirmmacher said, that he is proud to represent a human rights defender of this amazing type overseas. ISHR has supported Gómez as well as the Ladies in White for many years.

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- Photos:
 - [Photo 1](#): “Ladies in White” © IGFM
 - [Photo 2](#): With Lic. Caridad Diego Bello (orange jacket), Head of the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (Oficina de Atención a los Asuntos Religiosos del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, or CCPCC) and two of her staff members © BQ / Martin Warnecke
 - [Photo 3](#): In discussion with Juan de la Caridad García Rodríguez, Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Cristóbal de la Habana and chairman of the Bishops’ Conference © BQ / Martin Warnecke
 - [Photo 4](#): Bishops at a recent meeting of the Global Christian Forum in Cuba: the Catholic Archbishop of Havana (second from right); the Syrian-Orthodox Archbishop of Mount Lebanon near Beirut (second from left) © BQ / Martin Warnecke
 - [Photo 5](#): Thomas Schirmmacher and René Gómez Manzano in Havana © BQ / Martin Warnecke
- Ladies in White (Wikipedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ladies_in_White
- Carlos Eire. “Archbishop of Havana meets Ladies in White, promises his support”. Babalú Blog. February 16, 2017: <http://www.babalublog.com/2017/02/16/archbishop-of-havana-meets-with-ladies-in-white-promises-his-support/>
- René Gómez Manzano (Wikipedia):
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Gómez_Manzano
 - https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Gómez_Manzano
- René Gómez Manzano (Forum 2000): <http://www.forum2000.cz/en/lide/rene-gomez-manzano>

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