

Peaceful protest of Ladies in White movement broken up by police

The Pontis Foundation and Slovak organization People in Peril are seriously concerned with the forced breaking up of the peaceful protest of the Cuban movement Ladies in White (*Damas de Blanco*).

Peaceful protest took place on the Revolution Square in Havana on April 21, 2008 near the premises of the presidential office. During the protest wives and other relatives of political prisoners were demanding a meeting with President Raúl Castro. Cuban police broke up the protest after almost two hours. Protesting women were boarded on a bus, also by force, and taken back to their homes. During the police intervention the police was assisted by group of Cubans who were watching the peaceful protest.

In March this year five years have passed since the Cuban Black Spring (*La primavera negra*), when a mass crack down against human rights activists occurred in Cuba. The movement Ladies in White – wives, mothers and other relatives of 75 prisoners of conscience, are peacefully protesting for the release of their loved ones who have been imprisoned in some cases for 28 years solely for activities defending their basic rights such as freedom of speech and right to association. Fifty-five from the original 75 dissidents are still reported to be behind bars.

The Pontis Foundation and Slovak organization People in Peril are concerned with the fact that despite the change in Cuban leadership and announcement of various initiatives of economic reforms, which raised a wave of optimism, the police breaking up of the peaceful demonstration shows, that the situation regarding human rights in Cuba remains unchanged.

In February 2008, Cuban regime has joined the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. By this step, Cuba has obliged to fulfill and respect basic freedoms and rights, among others, to respect freedom of association and the freedom of speech.

For their activities, the Ladies in White were awarded the Sacharov Prize of the European Parliament and received many other international acknowledgements. They have become the symbol of peaceful resistance against the violation of human rights in Cuba.