

# Miami Herald

## Opinion

### Here's the most important thing Catholic bishops in Cuba should not concede to the regime | Opinion

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May 4, 2023

On April 27, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba held a meeting with senior officials of the Cuban communist regime, including President Miguel Díaz-Canel. Bishops had requested this meeting for more than two years, and it reportedly covered issues of common interest, including the socioeconomic crisis that afflicts the island.

Especially noteworthy, however, was that they discussed a potential release of prisoners jailed during the historic protests of July 11, 2021, when thousands of Cubans took to the streets to protest food shortages and power cuts, and to demand *libertad*. Of the hundreds imprisoned and prosecuted, several dozen are minors — a particularly flagrant injustice that has been widely denounced by the international community.

The possibility of a prisoner release was raised earlier this year during Italian Cardinal Benaimino Stella's visit. He conveyed Pope Francis' wishes for a "positive response" regarding the prisoners. Sadly, it is likely that Cuba's leaders see as a possible model what Nicaragua did with 222 of its high-profile political prisoners in February — deporting them to the United States and stripping them of their citizenship and property.

But the fact that the regime is discussing this with the bishops raises another troubling element: Cuban officials probably expect some kind of concession from the Catholic leaders. Add to this that Caridad Diego, who heads the notorious Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), — responsible for regulating all matters dealing with religion on the island — was at the meeting.

ORA is also the primary apparatus used to repress the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief. It has been well documented that the office refuses to recognize unregistered or disfavored religious groups and denies requests for permits for construction and to hold large events, for example.

Those who care about human rights, and specifically religious freedom in Cuba, should hope that the Cuban Catholic bishops do not bow to one concession that the ORA has likely asked for: the silencing of brave priests and nuns who have publicly spoken out against the regime's grave human-rights abuses.