

Cuban political prisoners who died in hunger strikes: 1959 to present

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Fidel Castro served only 18 months of a 15-year prison sentence for leading an attack on the Moncada Army Barracks. Dictator, Fulgencio Batista caved to public demands and freed all the attackers. During their captivity, they had enjoyed privileges for political prisoners -comfortable living conditions, visitors, plentiful reading materials, and participation in group sports. During the 51-year Castro regime political prisoners have been subjected to very harsh conditions and appalling treatment—hard labor, torture, beatings, malnourishment, lack of medical attention, and even killings at the hands of prison guards. Many have resorted to hunger strikes demanding humane treatment; sadly, some have paid with their lives.

13 documented cases to date For details see www.CubaArchive.org/database/

Roberto López Chávez, Age 25, died 12/11/1966 at Isla de Pinos Prison. In prison since 1961, he went on hunger strike to protest conditions after enduring a savage beating by prison guards. Moved to a punishment cell, he was denied drinking water, which worsened his condition. As he screamed for water, several guards entered his cell and one urinated over his open mouth as he lay on the floor. He died the next day without receiving medical attention, the 70th day of his strike.

Luis Álvarez Ríos, Age 31, died 8/9/1967 at Príncipe Castle Prison in Havana. He had been sentenced to 20 years of prison for counterrevolution. He and fellow prisoners went



on a hunger strike demanding to be separated from dangerous criminals. On the 11th day, prison authorities agreed and they ended the strike. Instead of receiving

medical attention, they were served a heavy meal despite knowing the body needs to ingest food slowly after fasting. Alvarez Ríos died almost immediately.

Francisco Aguirre Vidarrueta, died September 1967 at Príncipe Castle Prison demanding treatment as a political prisoner and refusing to wear the blue uniform of common prisoners/criminals.

Carmelo Cuadra Hernández, died 7/29/1969 in a Havana prison from a hunger strike, denied medical care.



Pedro Luis Boitel, Age 34, 5/25/1972 at Príncipe Castle Prison, Havana. Leader in the struggle against the Batista regime, he turned against the Castro brothers for hijacking the democratic process and was sentenced to ten years of prison for counterrevolution. In prison, he tortured, beaten, and abused and his sentence was extended. He went on many hunger strikes with fellow prisoners to protest executions and inhumane prison conditions. The hunger strike that took his life on his 12th

year of incarceration lasted 53 days. Denied medical care, he was ill treated by prison guards as he lay dying.



Olegario Charlot Spileta, died 1/15/1973 at Boniato Prison, Santiago de Cuba. Afro-Cuban political prisoner, died during a hunger strike without receiving medical attention.

Enrique García Cuevas, died 5/23/1973 at Pre-tensado Provincial Prison, Las Villas. He died on the 25th day of a hunger strike to protest the inhumane prison conditions and forced hard labor. Already very weak from malnourishment, he died without medical attention.



Reinaldo Cordero Izquierdo, died 5/21/1975 in a Pinar del Río prison. After serving his 10 year sentence in its entirety, it was arbitrarily increased. During his last year of confinement, he had also been severely tortured. He went on hunger strike, demanding a release and died in his prison cell, denied medical care.

José Barrios Pedré, died on 9/22/1977 at Pre-tensado Provincial, Las Villas, province during a hunger strike he started while being confined to an extreme punishment cell.

Santiago Roche Valle, Age 45, died 9/8/1985 at Kilo 7 Prison, Camaguey province, from heart failure, resulting during a hunger strike, denied medical attention.



Nicolás González Regueiro, Age 42, died 9/16/1992 in Manacas Prison, Las Villas. He was serving a 4-year prison sentence for distributing enemy propaganda when he developed a duodenal ulcer. He went on a hunger strike to protest the lack of medicine and his interment among common criminals.

Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Age 42, died 2/23/2010 after a hunger strike of 82 days. Incarcerated in 2003 and sentenced to three years for contempt, disrespect, and public disorder; his sentence was subsequently increased by over 30 years for "disobedience" for his repeated protests against his unjust incarceration and abuses. Having endured numerous beatings and torture, he began a hunger strike to demand his safety and to be recognized as a prisoner of conscience. During the strike, he was denied water for 18 days, which led to kidney failure, and was held naked over a powerful air conditioner, leading to pneumonia.



Wilman Villar Mendoza. The 31-year old father of two small daughters died 1/19/2012. He had been sentenced to 4 years of prison for "contempt, resistance, and attempting against the state" for a fabricated domestic violence incident. Upon arriving at a Santiago de Cuba prison he refused to wear the uniform for common prisoners and went on hunger strike to demand his release. Confined in a punishment cell without clothes and denied water, he contracted pneumonia and had no medical care. He was transferred to a hospital only when his condition was critical.



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