

CUBA: TWO YEARS WAITING FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR OSWALDO PAYÁ AND HAROLD CEPERO



July 22, 2014. Oswaldo Payá, age 60, and Harold Cepero, age 32, were killed July 22, 2012 in a car crash. Payá, founder and leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (known for its Spanish abbreviation MCL), was widely regarded as Cuba's leading dissident leader. Cepero was a young activist in the MLC. They had been traveling by car in Cuba's eastern Granma province with two visitors —Angel Carromero, member of the youth branch of Spain's Popular Party, and Aron Modig, President of the Christian Democrat Youth League of Sweden, both 27. Both foreigners were quickly removed from the site, apparently without seeing the passengers in the back; the Spaniard later claimed he had been drugged immediately. Cuba's Interior Ministry reported that Payá had died instantly from head trauma while Cepero had died a few hours later at the hospital from an "acute respiratory insufficiency" caused by a blood clot from a broken leg. Payá's body had, according to the family, no visible injuries. Autopsy reports were not provided.

From just hours after the crash, Payá's family has consistently maintained there was no "accident," as Mr. Modig had sent texts indicating they were being pursued and had been rammed off the road. But, Modig was kept in detention for days, then released to Swedish diplomats after he went on Cuban TV stating he did not remember any text messages and apologizing for bringing funds to the dissidents and conducting activities the Cuban regime deemed subversive. He has since claimed total amnesia of what happened. Mr. Carromero, the driver, was subjected to a sham trial and sentenced to four years of prison for involuntary homicide, serving jail in Cuba until December 2012, when the Spanish government agreed with Cuba for him to serve his remaining time in Spain. Five months after arriving in his home country, he confirmed to the media that a pursuing vehicle had rammed their car from behind and that he had been drugged, coerced, threatened with death, and given a script of the "accident" for a filmed confession. (See "Ángel Carromero speaks out on Cuba crash that killed Oswaldo Payá," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2013.) In March 2014, he published a book in Spanish describing his experience, "Muerte bajo sospecha: toda la verdad sobre el caso" ("Suspicious death: the whole truth about the case").

For years, Payá had been under constant surveillance and intimidation by State Security (Cuba's political police) and routinely threatened with death. Less than two months earlier, the car in which he was traveling with his wife was hit forcefully from behind by another vehicle in what they considered a deliberate act. The car overturned, but they escaped without serious injury.

Cuba Archive strongly supports the MCL and Payá's family in their challenge of the Cuban government's version and demands for a serious, impartial, and transparent investigation. We have reported on many other suspicious deaths or "accidents" as well as on alleged killings (extrajudicial deaths) by Cuban authorities of dissidents. (See www.CubaArchive.org.) These cases point to systematic and deliberate state action. The international community should hold the Cuban regime accountable.

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