

Cuban political prisoners who have died in hunger strikes (1959-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.

12 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 counterrevolutionary activities. He and fellow prisoners went on a hunger strike demanding to be separated from dangerous criminals. On the 11th day, prison authorities agreed to negotiate and they



ended the strike. Not given medical attention, instead, they were served a heavy meal. Doctors amongst the prisoners said it was dangerous, as the body needs to ingest food slowly after not eating. A group of prisoners ate the food and Alvarez Ríos died almost immediately. The family was allowed a hurried 2-hour wake.

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 counter-revolution. In prison, he was subjected to torture, beatings, and abuses and his sentence was extended. He went on numerous hunger strikes with several fellow prisoners to protest executions



and inhumane prison conditions and to demand rights as political prisoners. The hunger strike that took his life on his 12th year of incarceration lasted 53 days. Denied medical care even as his condition became critical, he was ill treated by prison guards as he lay dying. After his death, his widowed mother was subjected to physical violence and isolated in her home. When she was allowed to visit her son's alleged grave with some women friends, an angry mob that threatened them with violence awaited them and they were forced to leave without praying.

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

Enrique García Cuevas, died 5/23/1973 at Pretensado Provincial Prison, Las Villas. He went on a hunger strike at Manacas Prison of Las Villas to protest the inhumane prison conditions and forced hard labor. Already very weak from malnourishment, after 25 days on strike, he was transferred to another prison, where 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, his sentence 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 of complications, denied medical care.

José Barrios Pedré, died on 9/22/1977 at Pretensado 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 complications (heart failure) from 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 internment among common criminals.

Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Age 42, died 2/23/2010 after a hunger strike of 82 days. He had been designated prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. 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" as a result of his repeated protests against prison abuses and his unjust incarceration. Having suffered numerous beatings and torture, he began a hunger strike demanding his safety and to be recognized as a prisoner of conscience. During the strike, he was denied water for 18 days (instead minimally hydrated by IV), which led to kidney failure. Later, he was held naked over a powerful air conditioner, which provoked pneumonia. He was transferred to a hospital just hours before his death.

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