

## 83 cases of death and disappearances reported in 2021 attributed to the Cuban state (48 documented)

February 1, 2022

**5 extrajudicial killings**  
**3 deaths in custody**  
**2 deaths in the obligatory military service**  
**2 suicides/alleged suicides not in custody**  
**2 activists denied medical care**  
**7 “internationalists”**  
**62 reported asylum seekers (27 “documented”)**

Cuba Archive considers a case “documented” when it has sufficient information including the victim’s name. The actual number of victims is believed much higher than documented. See CubaArchive.org for details on this project including the database for individual cases.

### I. 5 extrajudicial killings



**Luis Alberto Sánchez Valdés**, died at a Havana hospital on January 2, 2021. The young man was standing in a line in front of a store in Pinar del Río when a policeman requested his ID and he offered a copy, stating his

original was at home. An argument ensued and the agent pushed him to the floor, hitting his head, and continued to beat him with his stick. Social media posts from official sources initially said that Luis Alberto was an epileptic, which his family denied. The Ministry of the Interior subsequently issued a communiqué that he had died of a severe cerebral edema from cranial trauma with fracture after suddenly falling from his own two feet when the police asked for his ID. The doctor who treated him indicated that a fall could not provoke the injuries he presented and his family said he had been beaten with an object (this was confirmed with independent medical experts).

**Diubis Laurencio Tejada**, age 36, was shot to death by police on July 12, 2021 at La Güinera neighborhood of Arroyo Naranjo, Havana, the day after mass protests all over Cuba. He was shot in the back by policeman Yoennis Pelegrín, who fired at an unarmed crowd staging a peaceful protest, also injuring two other individuals. Diubis was an



only son. The Prosecutor’s office declared that Diubis was a delinquent and that the shooting had been justified in “legitimate defense.” 161 of the protesters faced charges of public disorder. In September 2021, the Military Prosecutor’s Office opened a file on Pelegrín to

investigate the death and the gunshot wounds to a 16-year-old but no charges have been filed.



**Christian Barrera Díaz**, age 24, was presumably killed extrajudicially for attempting to leave Cuba on July 12, 2021, the day after mass protests erupted all over the island. He had participated in the protests and had left home for

Sierrita beach, Matanzas, planning to escape the island by boat. Elite government troops arrived at dawn and opened fire. His family was told that he was in custody in Matanzas with a group arrested for trying to leave “illegally.” After fruitlessly searching prisons in the province, three weeks later, the family was told that he had drowned but the body found three days later was too decomposed

for identification and had been buried in a common grave. He left a one-year-old son.



**Eduardo Nodarse Pérez**, age 52, was presumably killed April 17, 2021 while in custody at a police station in Cojímar, Havana. He was arrested after calling the police to report the theft of two sacks of rice from the grocery store where he

worked as a security guard. The following day, the family was notified that he was dead. The police report initially said the cause of death was a heart attack but was later changed to respiratory failure. He had been in good health. No reason was given for his arrest upon denouncing the theft.



**Elíades Peña Carballo**, age 47, was reportedly beaten to death at a police station in Manatí, Las Tunas, on May 4, 2021 while in custody. He had been on a protest hunger strike since his arrest on April 28, 2021. Authorities claimed he

hanged himself but provided the family differing accounts of how. Screams were heard hours before his death was reported and his body had bruises to the lower abdomen and the neck as well as two swollen fingers. Elíades was a milk-producing farmer who had been charged with “pre-criminal social dangerousness.” His trial had been scheduled for May 3, 2021 but had been postponed for the following day, reportedly because it had been determined that his charges would be dismissed as it had been found that the signatures sustaining his charges had been falsified. He left two children and three grandchildren.

## II. 3 deaths in custody

*Cuba does not report on deaths in custody. All deaths in custody for which credible information is obtained are documented due to the absence of due process, the nature of Cuba’s laws, and the practice of convicting of common crimes persons who pose any threat to the regime together with the*

*dire prison conditions, excessive mistreatment, lack of medical attention, and absence of international oversight. Many persons in custody are driven to suicide but many others deaths officially reported as suicides are believed to be extrajudicial killings.*

### 1 in hunger strike (in custody)



**Mykel Acosta Sánchez**, age 35, died May 6, 2021 at the Hospital Nacional of Havana, after at least 19 days of hunger strike in protest for his unjust detention. He had been held at the Combinado del

Este prison of Havana in isolation and denied water as well as family visits. Mykel had been in prison since 2004, when at age 17 he was accused of robbery with violence for allegedly ripping a chain from the neck of a woman. While on parole years later, he was accused of drug trafficking and incarcerated again. He had always claimed his innocence with respect to both charges.

### 1 suicide/alleged suicide (in custody)

**Reinaldo Montediel López**, age 34, was found dead in his cell on June 19, 2021, at Tarea Confianza prison in Cienfuegos, presumably after hanging himself. He had been serving a 30-year sentence for murder and had been captured after escaping a forced labor camp. He had reportedly told fellow prisoners that he was tired of so much suffering.

### 1 from denial of medical care (in custody)

**Sabino Serrano López**, age 70, died on March 24, 2021 for lack of medical attention at the Miguel Henríquez Hospital of Havana. He had spent 22 years in prison and had never been provided adequate medical attention for a circulatory affliction. Doctors had told him a month earlier that the only option to avoid death from gangrene was the amputation of his feet, however, authorities at the Combinado del Este prison of Havana, were he was held, had failed to approve the surgery. The cause of death reported was a heart attack, yet he had spent several days very ill with a very bloated stomach. Serrano had been sentenced in 1999 to life in prison for human trafficking for piloting a boat that had been sunk by Cuban border guards, incident in which a 36-year-old Cuban woman and her 4-year-old son had drowned.

### III. 2 in the obligatory military service

*All males in Cuba must, by law, register for military service at age 16 and are obliged to serve for two years, preferably between 18 and 28 years of age. They are generally forced to work in all sorts of manual labor, usually lacking proper gear, under terrible conditions, fed subsistence diets and even forced to donate blood to supply a State business.*



**Annier González**, age 18, committed suicide on July 4, 2021 at Combinado del Este de La Habana while serving the obligatory military service. He had been assigned, with no prior training, to guard alone a three-story tower at the prison immediately after coming out of a 12-day COVID prevention isolation after a three-day home visit. He took his own life that same day. His father claimed that he must have been overcome with anxiety or panicked, as he had never even held a rifle.



**Carel Gutiérrez**, age 18, was crushed to death on November 20, 2021 in service at a military unit in Artemisa. The wind had pushed seven steel pipes laying carelessly on a roof that fell on him as he was cutting the grass. His mother reported that he had wanted to avoid the military service, explaining: “He did not want to go and, six days after being forced by this dictatorship, this happens. He was very sad and tearful when they put him in the truck. He was just a boy.”

### IV. 2 suicides/alleged suicides not in custody



**Juan Carlos Linares**, a prominent human rights activist, died in Guanabo, Havana province on January 1, 2021, reportedly by his own hand. In more than two decades as an independent journalist, he

had been systematically harassed and persecuted by state authorities and in 2017 had been detained for several days for an alleged crime of “contempt of a public official.” This had greatly affected his family, leading to his despair. He left a wife and an 11-year-old son.

**Jorge Cachón Martínez** committed suicide on March 29, 2021 in Guaro, Holguín, after receiving two fines for absurdly high amounts, several times the average monthly salary, for selling root vegetables without a license. One of the state agents who fined him also stole the produce. The young man, an orphan, felt cornered and saw no way out other than to take his own life.

### V. 2 human rights’ activists denied medical care



**Jacqueline Borrego Cuesta**, age 48, died at home in Havana on May 10, 2021. A member of a peaceful opposition group, she had suffered a multiple brain stroke in 2018 that had affected a large part of her body. Her health had gradually deteriorated and she developed advanced malnutrition. For over a year, she had been denied medical attention, a special diet, and other essential assistance, and her family was unable to feed her.



**Ariel Valdés García**, member of a peaceful opposition group, died in Havana on January 22, 2021, left to die at home and denied medical attention. Valdés had been in critical condition at home for two weeks with conditions reported as chronic dermatitis and anemia. Several of his neighbors attempted to have him admitted to a hospital, to no avail. His family doctor had also tried to have him hospitalized but was told no beds were available.

## VI. 7 “internationalists”

*Because the Cuban government runs a state business that exports temporary workers in conditions akin to trafficking in persons, all deaths related to their service abroad are documented.*



**Onilber Aguilera**, age 44, died on April 17, 2021 reportedly of COVID. The engineer was part of Cuba’s Medical Coordination team in Venezuela, heading the Medical Insurance Group in the state of Carabobo.

**Dr. Anibaldo Matos Hernández**, age 45, died on December 17, 2021 from a pulmonary embolism. He was part of Cuba's medical mission in Guatemala.



**Dr. Yamilka Powell Vague**, age 39, died on May 17, 2021 from a cerebro-vascular stroke. She was part of Cuba’s medical brigade in Venezuela. Fellow doctors

com-plained about the stressful working conditions, their very poor diet, and a lack of medicines to care for patients, which had led to several suicides and preventable deaths.



**Ireysi Dilu Sánchez** age 40, died in April 2021 of COVID. She was a specialist in Statistics working as a doctor as part of Cuba’s internationalist medical mission to Venezuela. Cuban authorities

would not confirm her death or the circumstances.



**Dr. Alfredo Luis Negrín Guerra**, age 66, died on April 18, 2021 of an unspecified illness. The Cuban maxillofacial surgeon was part of Cuba's medical brigade in Djibouti since September of 2016.



**Dr. Lincoln Eduardo Bertot Pérez**, died in June 2021, from an unspecified illness a few days after returning to Cuba from a medical mission in Africa. He was an anesthesiologist.



**Dr. Ronald Guillen Hodge**, died on June 17, 2021 from complications of COVID-19. The neurosurgeon was part of Cuba’s medical brigade to Tanzania.

## VII. 27 asylum seekers



**Diosmany Ramos Laurencio**, age 23, was shot dead by a US border patrol officer on January 29, 2021. He had crossed the US-Mexico border across the Rio Grande from Reynosa, Mexico, with four other Cubans when they were

intercepted around 4 a.m. Ramos threatened to throw a rock at one of the officers, who shot him in the chest for refusing to release it. The officer shot him four more times as he lay on the ground for refusing to release the rock. The young man had left Cuba with his girlfriend for Cancun, Mexico, in

January 2020 and had crossed the country to seek asylum in the US. The incident was under investigation by US authorities. Ramos left behind a child of two years in Cuba.

**José Ramón** (unknown last name), age 43, drowned on March 23, 2021 at the beach in the Tijuana, Mexico, bordering San Diego, California, while trying to cross into the United States to seek asylum.



Nine asylum seekers disappeared, one drowned and one family member from Florida was killed in Bahamian waters on May 2, 2021. Disappeared: **Lisbethy Alfonso Aborresco**, age 28, her two children **Kenna Mariana Rodríguez Alfonso**, age 6, and **Luis Hernández Alfonso**, age 4 (see photos) and six others: **Antonio Turiño Hernández**, **Yadiel Martínez Casamayor**, **Maritza Cárdenas Turiño**, **Orelvis Pérez Ruiz**, **Sekiel Castro Vergel** and **Leonardo Cárdenas**. The body of female passenger (name unknown) was recovered. A large group that had left from Caibarién, Cuba, had been left in the uninhabited Cay Sal, Bahamas. They were picked up by another boat that had sailed from Florida to take them to the United States. This second boat capsized, apparently from an explosion that killed one of its passengers, **Omar Figueroa** (photo), who had come to pick up his wife Lisbethy and her two small children. 19 survivors were in the water for over 14 hours before being rescued by the Bahamian Royal Navy; 12 were part of the group that had left Cuba. All were taken to the Bahamas—two were hospitalized with burns and the rest taken to a detention center.



**Esneiquel Galdo Arechea**, age 40, age 41, drowned on April 2, 2021 while attempting to cross the Rio Bravo from Mexico into the United States. His body was found in Laredo, Texas. He left three sons.



**Victor David Copello**, age 21, died on April 12, 2021 at the border between Bolivia and Peru, on his way to the United States by land. His body was abandoned in Patacamaya, Bolivia.



**Yosmel Barrios Bernal**, age 35, died at the General Hospital of Tapachula, Mexico, on April 16, 2021 of dehydration. He had been traveling by land from Uruguay in an effort to reach the United States. In August of 2019 Barrios had left Cuba for Guyana, then to

Brazil, and crossed the border into Uruguay, staying in Uruguay for several months. In December of 2020, he started the long trip to reach the United States. He was HIV positive.



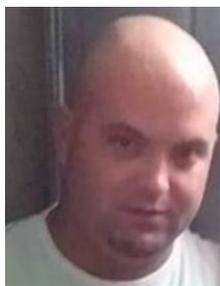
**Yliama Samón** and her son **Alberto Martínez** drowned in April 2021 in the Darién River, in the jungle between Colombia and Panama. They were trying to reach Mexico to cross into the United States.



**Cristian San Martin Estrada**, age 19, was shot in Ciudad Juárez, México, on May 17, 2021 as he sat on a bench outdoor, at night, in front of the hotel where he and his uncle were staying. He had arrived three days earlier

from Nogales and was awaiting entry into the U.S. under an asylum petition. He had just been informed that he would soon be allowed into the United States.

**Méndez Ramírez** (first name unknown) and eight more persons (names unknown) drowned on July 5, 2021 in an exit attempt from Cuba. The group of 22 had left Cuba from Habana del Este with the intention of reaching the United States. Cuban Border Guard had alerted them of a coming tropical storm (“Elsa”), yet allowed them to proceed. That same night rough seas overturned their vessel. 13 survivors were found by US Coast Guard after 22 hours in the water and were all returned to Cuba.



**Alexis Pérez Fernández**, age 28, died on August 14, 2021. He had left Cuba on a raft with four other friends trying to reach Mexico, but a wave overturned the raft. Mexico’s Coast Guard rescued all except Alexis, who was attacked by several sharks

before he could be rescued.



**Jill Leyva Toledano**, age 25 and a native of Guantánamo, drowned on September 22, 2021 while trying to cross the Rio Grande from Mexico attempting to reach the United States to request asylum. She had left Cuba

almost two years earlier for Uruguay, from where she had started a long journey to the US border a year earlier. Her body was found on September 22, 2021 on the banks of the Rio Grande.

**Juana Sumita Torres** and **Manuella Gómez** died in a car accident on September 22, 2021 in Veracruz, Mexico, while traveling to the US border to seek asylum. The two women and two men whose names are unknown died in the accident, and **Richard Katula Villanueva**, 40, died the next day at the Oluta Civil Protection hospital. An apparent punctured tire caused the Ford Explorer van they were traveling in to overturn and fall into a ravine.



**Lisandra Bravo Alarcón**, age 45, drowned on October 11, 2021 together with two Haitian women when the boat sank in which they had sailed from Colombia attempting to reach Panama. She was traveling with her husband,

14-year-old son, 5-year-old daughter, parents, and brother; they had left from Chile in a long journey towards the U.S. to request asylum. Fishermen and members of Colombia’s Navy rescued 21 migrants, including five minors, mostly Cuban, Haitian, and Venezuelan migrants.



**Magaly Medina Calvo**, age 57, died December 6, 2021 from a stroke at a migrant shelter in Ciudad Juárez. She had been screaming at night for an entire month due to headaches. The shelter’s staff had ignored her pleas

until she was finally taken to a hospital the day she died. Mexico's National Human Rights Commission later determined that the shelter's medical personnel had been negligent. Medina was awaiting her first appointment in the U.S. Asylum Court of El Paso, Texas, having been returned to Ciudad Juárez by US immigration authorities on November 10, 2019. She was trying to reunite with her two children in the US, who had emigrated from Cuba ten years earlier.

**35 unnamed victims: 9 fatalities, 26 disappeared**

*Cuba Archive has credible press reports on at least 35 more Cubans who died or disappeared in attempts to leave Cuba in order to obtain asylum. The dates and circumstances are known, however, it has not been possible to access names, sex and age to be able to document these cases and add them to the database.*

March 8, 2021: **One fatality, 5 disappeared** and 18 people rescued from the shipwreck of a small boat by the Royal Bahamas Defense Force and the U.S. Coast Guard in Bahamian waters, south of Cay Sal.

May 2, 2021: **one fatality**, a female, whose name is unknown, drowned in the shipwreck that left 9 missing and one who died in a boat explosion (documented above) in Bahamian waters. The Royal Bahamas Navy recovered her body.

July 5, 2021: **8 disappeared** from a group of 22 that had left Cuba from East Havana in a boat that capsized from tropical storm Elsa. The US Coast Guard rescued 13 survivors who spent 22 hours in the water (all were returned to Cuba). One body, of Méndez Ramírez (first name unknown) was recovered, as documented above.

May 27, 2021: **2 fatalities, 10 disappeared**, and 8 Cubans rescued by the US Coast Guard after they left Cuba on a boat that capsized several miles from the Florida Keys.

August 29, 2021: **3 disappeared**. A Cuban rafter who had been adrift for ten days was rescued by the US Coast Guard southeast of Cape Florida, Key Biscayne. Three companions died.

September 22, 2021: **2 fatalities** in a serious traffic accident in Mexico that left three more fatalities, documented above, and seven injured.

November 27, 2021. **One fatality**, a male, who died from trying to climb the border wall between Mexico and the United States. A Border Patrol agent discovered the unconscious man with a significant head injury near Screw, Texas. His wife confirmed that he had hit her head after falling while trying to get over the barrier.

December 11, 2021: **2 fatalities** reported by Cuban authorities in the sinking of a speedboat with US registration on the northern coast of Cuba.



[www.CubaArchive.org](http://www.CubaArchive.org)  
Free Society Project, Inc.

Reproduction or distribution of this material is authorized as long as its source is cited.