

CUBA: THE HUMAN COST OF RAÚL CASTRO'S RULE

March 30, 2026

Raúl Castro, architect and enforcer of Cuba's dictatorship: 1959 to 2026

Raúl Castro Ruz will be 95 on June 3rd —for 73 years he has committed appalling crimes against Cuba's citizens and deprived them of their fundamental civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, starting with that of self-determination.



Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and Che Guevara, early days of the revolution (Photo: Prensa Latina)

A Marxist since his student days, Raúl was closely aligned with his older brother, Fidel, since the early days of the struggle against the Batista dictatorship; they jointly staged the attack on the Moncada Barracks (Santiago de Cuba, 1953), served 22 months in prison, lived exiled in Mexico, and disembarked from the yacht Granma to start the armed struggle in the eastern mountains of Cuba (1956). In the Sierra Maestra, Raúl led the

Second Eastern Front (with few fighters). After Batista fled the country and the revolutionary forces took control in 1959, Raúl was second in command as Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces for 49 years (1959-2008) and Vice President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers once the Communist system was institutionalized (1976-2008).

In late 1989, Raúl had taken control of the Ministry of the Interior following the purge linked to Cases No. 1 and No. 2, which led to the execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa and Colonel Antonio de la Guardia and aides. In 2006, when Fidel fell ill, Raúl assumed power and was eventually officially appointed President of Cuba (2008), and in 2011, replaced Fidel as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. During the brother-to-brother succession, Raúl consolidated direct control of most of Cuba's economy when the military corporate conglomerate GAESA under his command absorbed the CIMEX conglomerate, long controlled by Fidel. In 2018, Raúl designated a reliable party apparatchik, Miguel Díaz-Canel, to replace him as President, and in 2021, as First Secretary of the Party. Although is officially retired, it is widely accepted that Raúl continues to run the country with a cohort of family members and old-timers, to which the Communist Party and military brass remain fully subordinated.



Left: [Elizabeth Meizoso](#), age 2, killed with seven other civilians on October 29, 2022 by Cuba’s Border Guard, that rammed their boat carrying 23 people. Right: [Caridad Leyva](#), age 5, killed by Cuban authorities with 36 men, women, and children on July 13, 1994 while trying to flee Cuba in a tugboat. (See [report](#).)

Raúl is co-responsible with his brother Fidel for installing and maintaining in Cuba a totalitarian Communist dictatorship that has perpetrated atrocious crimes and has had an excessive toll in human lives. Cuba Archive, in an ongoing project, has documented 8,267 deaths and disappearances attributed to the Castro-Communist regime for political reasons from January 1, 1959 to date, including 3,084 executions by firing squad and the mass killing of civilians, including at least 21 children,

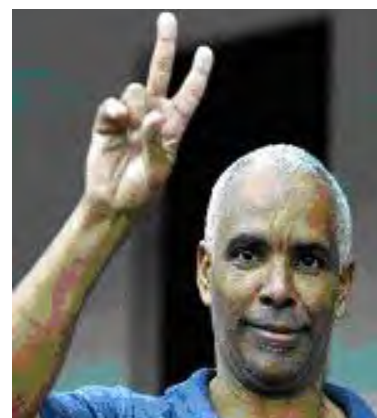
simply for attempting to leave the country (see [report](#)). The actual number of cases is believed to be much higher.

Raúl as the “Maximum Leader”: July 31, 2006 – March 15, 2026

Since Raúl Castro assumed supreme command of Cuba in 2006, after Fidel Castro’s illness, Cuba Archive has documented to date (March 15, 2026) 1,002 deaths and disappearances attributed to the Cuban state, including 134 extrajudicial killings, 6 forced disappearances, 19 during hunger strikes in custody, 261 resulting from denial of medical care or medical conditions in custody, 116 suicides in custody or of a political nature/induced, 41 from gross or criminal negligence within the Armed Forces/Police, and 365 in exit attempts from Cuba. The actual number of victims is believed to be much higher.

Below is a year-by-year breakdown of deaths that occurred throughout Cuba starting in 2006. It is difficult to single out certain cases over others, as every life counts and every one unjustly taken carries enormous implications and lasting repercussions. Each one leaves behind many grieving loved ones—including, in many instances, children who have lost a parent.

- **August 5, 2006, State Security Department, Santa Clara, Cuba.** [Jesús Marquez Lemez](#) was arrested by Cuba’s Border Guard for attempting to escape the country with twenty other people—their boat was rammed and forced to stop. Authorities reported that he hanged himself with a sheet after being told he could face up to twenty years in prison. His family and friends believe he was murdered.
- **January 10, 2007, Havana, Cuba.** 50-year-old [Miguel Valdés Tamayo](#) died of a heart condition (severe arrhythmia) aggravated by constant abuses by state agents. The former prisoner of conscience had visas to travel to the Netherlands or the United States for medical treatment, but was denied permission to leave the country.



Miguel Valdés Tamayo

- **March 5, 2008, Havana, Cuba.** Human rights activist and former political prisoner [Rigoberto Martínez Castillo](#) died several hours after a brutal beating at his home by State Security agents.
- **June 25, 2009, Kilo 7 prison, Camagüey, Cuba.** Common prisoner [Geovany Castellano](#) took an overdose of pills after
- being hanged from prison bars for 24 hours in a torture known as “crucifixion.” Fellow prisoners alerted guards, who did not send for medical attention for twelve hours, too late to save his life.
- **March 24, 2010, Pinar del Río, Cuba.** [Julio Santos Hernández](#) was beaten by prison guards at Kilo 5 y medio prison, suffering a broken trachea and vertebrae, and died at the hospital 22 days later.
- **May 8, 2011, Santa Clara.** [Juan Wilfredo Soto](#), age 45, died three days after a brutal beating by four uniformed policemen for refusing to leave a park where he was talking with friends. He was a member of a group of peaceful opponents and former political prisoner whose first prison sentence was at age 16 for expressing opposition to the government at school.
- **January 20, 2012, Santiago de Cuba.** 31-year old political prisoner [Wilman Villar Mendoza](#) died during a hunger strike to denounce his unjust incarceration. For declaring a hunger strike, he had been held in solitary confinement in a punishment cell and denied water. After contracting pneumonia, he was not given medical care.
- **November 4, 2013, Ciego de Avila, Cuba.** 27-year-old [Jorge Lemaine Martínez](#), a tourism driver at Cayo Coco (tourist key), was arrested for failing to produce his route plan. Police said he committed suicide with an electrical cable minutes after being placed in a cell at the police station.
- **October 13, 2014, Holguín, Cuba.** 25-year-old [Luis Miguel Arias Cala](#) died after being forcefully injected with an unknown substance in prison some months earlier. His condition deteriorated immediately after receiving the injection and intensive care doctors refused to treat the symptoms. His initial eight-year sentence had been increased by seven years for informing human rights groups of prison abuses.
- **April 2015, Ariza prison, Cienfuegos, Cuba.** [Aurelio Quesada Jiménez](#) died in his cell from kidney failure. For several weeks, the head of the prison had denied him medical care for strong abdominal pain.
- **July 28, 2016, Las Tunas, Cuba.** 33-year-old [Yusnel Contrera Kirskourt](#), a member of Cuba’s peaceful opposition movement, was shot to death by police agents who had gone to arrest him at his home. He had been sentenced to 4 years of prison despite not being charged with a crime.
- **2017. Melena del Sur prison, Mayabeque, Cuba.** Common prisoner [Rafael Arredondo](#) was beaten by prison guards while he had his hands tied, which resulted in his death. According to 17 fellow prisoners in a letter for the United Nations, he was the fifth prisoner to have died to date in 2017, subjected to mistreatment, violence, and inhumane prison conditions.
- **November 5, 2018, Irandúa, Manaus, Brazil.** [Dr. Eduardo Vázquez Roche](#) died of an acute pulmonary edema while serving in a Cuban “internationalist mission” in a remote area of Brazil. He was the sixth Cuban doctor s to die in Brazil in a six-month period subjected to Cuba’s huge state-run forced labor/trafficking in persons business.
- **April 27, 2019, Havana.** 45-year-old [Iván Michel Ponce de León](#) died at a hospital eight days after a brutal beating by police officers while under arrest at the Punto 30 police station in Old Havana. Authorities said he had fallen in the bathroom, but eyewitnesses said that the officers beat him tirelessly with their batons and doctors told the family he had died from a blow to the head with a blunt object.

- **August 7, 2020, penal wing of the Amalia Simoní Hospital, Camagüey, Cuba.** Human rights activist and former political prisoner [Yosvany Aróstegui Almenteros](#) died after a 40-day hunger strike in protest for his unjust sentence to 15 years in jail for fabricated charges. His family was not allowed to see him at the hospital to which he was transferred in critical condition.



1st row left to right: Wilfredo Soto, Diubis Tejada, Alfonso Chaviano, Manuel Guillén. 2nd row left to right: Wilman Villar, Eduardo Vázquez, Yosvany Aróstegui, Luis Oña

- **July 12, 2021, La Güinera, Havana, Cuba.** [Diubis Laurencio Tejada](#), age 36, was shot to death in the back by police, who fired at an unarmed crowd staging a peaceful street demonstration the day after mass protests all over Cuba.
- **May 4, 2022, Santiago de Cuba.** [Alfonso Chaviano Peláez](#), a human rights activist and former political prisoner, died in custody a day after his detention by State Security.
- **February 26, 2023, Santiago de Cuba.** [Sergio Pozo Hernández](#), age 30, died after a beating by a police officer at a highway checkpoint.
- **November 30, 2024, Combinado del Este prison, Havana, Cuba.** 30-year-old [Manuel Guillén Esplugas](#) died in a punishment cell of a reported suicide by hanging. His body had clear signs of a brutal beating. He was serving six years in prison for having filmed and distributed videos of antigovernmental nationwide mass protests of July 11, 2021.
- **July 2025, Cienfuegos, Cuba.** [Adrián Alonso](#) shouted “Down with the dictatorship” from the window of his apartment during a blackout and was stabbed to death by a policeman. Earlier that year, in February 11, 2025, 44-year old [Yoleisy Oviedo Rodríguez](#), a mother of two, died lacking medical attention at El Guatao Forced Labor Camp, Havana, Cuba. She was serving a 5-year prison sentence for participating in a peaceful protest (Oct. 2022) against prolonged

power outages affecting Güines, Mayabeque.

- **February 15, 2026, Havana, Cuba.** 27 year old political prisoner [Luis Miguel Oña Jiménez](#) was serving a 12-year sentence at a prison for HIV patients for “sedition” for participating in the mass peaceful protests of July 11, 2021. After suffering a stroke due to high blood pressure, he was unable to move his mouth, hands, or feet. Transferred to a Havana hospital at his family's insistence, he was given a terminal diagnosis and released home on parole, dying shortly afterward.



Yoleisy Oviedo

Raúl’s blood-soaked legacy

Raúl started killing in his twenties, during the fight against Batista in the mountains of eastern Cuba. Together with brother Fidel and Che Guevara, they arbitrarily ordered (1957-1958) at least twenty-five executions carried out without due process of law: three deserters of the Rebel Army, eight local peasants for collaborating with the Batista Army, seven for assorted reasons—including a soldier for taking off his boots in violation of the rules—and seven for alleged crimes (petty theft, rape, and murder).

As soon as the revolutionary government came to power on January 1, 1959—after General Fulgencio Batista fled the country—dozens of his supporters and members of the armed forces and police were subjects of immediate “revolutionary justice,” accused of “war crimes” and other abuses; many were promptly executed, deprived of the most basic due process rights and in violation of Cuba’s Constitution. The new regime encouraged extensive media coverage showcased the killing even on TV and in movie previews and to instill terror, stifle opposition, and consolidate power rapidly.

Cuba Archive has documented 805 firing squad executions in 1959 alone, along with 62 extrajudicial killings and 4 forced disappearances. (See Cuba Archive’s [database of deaths and disappearances](#) for the individual records.) Subsequent historical research indicates that many of those executed had not committed the crimes for which they were accused.¹ (See [report](#).)

Raúl was designated Commander in charge of Oriente Province from early January until mid-February 1959. Just in January, he ordered the firing squad execution of 140 men without due process. In addition, five extrajudicial killings are recorded, including one in which Cuban Navy vessels killed an individual attempting to escape to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo. By January 15th, the UPI news agency was quoting Raúl Castro stating that 106 “war criminals” had already been executed in Oriente Province and that further executions would follow.

¹ On January 15, 1959, Raúl told the UPI news agency that the Batista regime had murdered 10,000 people—a claim the revolutionary government soon increased to 20,000 without ever publishing an official list of victims. In time, this proved to be completely false. An exhaustive investigation by Cuba Archive identified 862 extrajudicial killings throughout Cuba over the entire Batista dictatorship (March 10, 1952 to December 31, 1958), many committed by the same perpetrators—paramilitary thugs, as well as members of the police and armed forces.

The San Juan Hill Massacre of January 12, 1959

*Sargeant Victor Castro Lora,
executed Jan. 12, 1959 at San Juan
Hill, Santiago de Cuba*

On January 11, a “revolutionary tribunal” in Santiago de Cuba sentenced four men to death after a 4-hour summary trial. Raúl Castro entered the scene, stopped the proceedings, and ordered the immediate execution of 68 additional men. 71 —one mysteriously escaped— were massacred at dawn, tied together in pairs, taken by truck to a shooting range, in sight of the San Juan Hill, where Teddy Roosevelt had charged during the Spanish American War. [Time magazine reported](#): “A bulldozer ripped out a trench 40 ft. long, 10 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep. ... Before dawn, buses rolled out to the range and the condemned men dismounted, their hands tied, their faces drawn. Some pleaded that they had been rebel sympathizers all along; some wept; most stood silent. One broke for the woods, was caught and dragged back. Half got blindfolds. A priest led two of the prisoners through the glare of truck headlights to the edge of the trench and then stepped back. Six rebel executioners fired, and the bodies jackknifed into the grave. Two more prisoners stepped forward, then two more and two more—and the grave slowly filled. ... On a hill overlooking the range, a crowd gathered and cheered as

each volley rang out. “Kill them, kill them,” the spectators bellowed.” At least one of the victims was buried alive —his hand holding a rock emerged from the mound. See [report](#).

Forced labor and other abuses from a mandatory military service for even minors

Raúl Castro is responsible for imposing mandatory military service for decades, required for even minors under 18 —a practice that continues to this day. On November 12, 1963 he went on Cuban television to deliver a long speech detailing the Mandatory Military Service Law requiring 3-year service for “all Cuban males from January 1st of the year in which they turn 17 and extending until December 31st of the year in which they turn 45.” In 1973, another law was enacted mandating a three-year period of service for men aged 16 to 27 and establishing a mandatory military reserve until age 45.

In 1973, the Ministry of Defense created the Youth Labor Army (Ejército Juvenil del Trabajo, or EJT) to serve as a paramilitary labor force for agricultural, construction, and other productive activities. It imposed forced labor on conscripts unsuitable for military life due to health problems, low educational level, or needing “reeducation” for “deviancy,” antisocial behavior, or “ideological problems.”

For decades, both the compulsory military service and the EJT have been dreaded ordeals that leave lasting physical and psychological wounds. Many young recruits are assigned to remote units far from their families, where they face forced labor, deplorable living conditions, inadequate medical care, chronic food shortages, and lacking training in the use of firearms and dangerous military equipment. Safety standards



*Annier González committed suicide in his
military unit on July 4, 2021*

inadequate and accidents are frequent. Many recruits have died in preventable accidents and many others by suicide or treatable medical conditions; some self-inflict injuries, including breaking limbs, attempting to avoid or escape service. Deserters and escapees are severely punished with prison sentences and, historically, even with execution. Cuba Archive has document-ted for 2020 to 2025 alone, 60 deaths of young recruits, including 8 extrajudicial killings, and 22 suicides (of at least one 16-year-old and two 17 years’ old). See a detailed [report](#).

The high cost in lives of Cuba’s revolutionary imperialism

Raúl was directly in charge of Cuba’s Armed Forces during military incursions in [Angola](#), Ethiopia, and Syria, for which Cuba Archive has documented 889 Cuban casualties from what is believed to be at least twice more. The collective cost in lives of the peoples of Angola, Ethiopia, and others is estimated in the hundreds of thousands, though precise figures are uncertain. The Castro regime is also responsible for decades of international interventions — with military assistance, training, arms supply, funding, and support for guerrilla movements— across multiple continents for decades, contributing to further loss of life. The [strategic occupation by Cuba of Venezuela](#) during the Chavez-Maduro regime cost an estimated 10,000 Venezuelan lives in 2013–2023.



Ambassador John Gordon Mein, Dan Mitrione, Frank Connor and Earl Cobeil

At least eight US citizens have been killed in attacks by terrorist groups sponsored or supported by Cuba. (See [report](#). Ambassador [John Gordon Mein](#), age 54, was the first US Ambassador murdered in office, killed August 28, 1968 in Guatemala City by the Cuba-supported guerrilla group *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*. [Alejandro Berger](#), age 28, [Frank Connor](#), age 33, and [James Gezork](#), age 32, and [Harold Sherburne](#), age 66, were killed in a terrorist bombing attack on January 24, 1975 of the historic restaurant Fraunces Tavern in Lower Manhattan by the Cuba-sponsored Puerto Rican nationalist terrorist group *Frente Armado de Liberación Nacional* (FALN). [Charles Steinberg](#), age 26, was killed August 3, 1977 in a bombing attack in New York City. From 1974-83 FALN was responsible for 72 bombings, 40 incendiary attacks, and 8 attempted bombings in several U.S. cities.

[Dan Mitrione](#), a former police chief in Indiana and father of nine, was a US government security advisor helping train Uruguayan police. He was kidnapped, tortured, and killed on August 10, 1970 by Tupamaro guerrillas directed by two high-ranking Cuba’s Ministry of the Interior officers.

Dozens of Cuban advisors were sent to Vietnam during the war. In 1967-68, Cuban agents tested a vicious experimental domination technique on 18 US POWs at Hanoi’s prison known as “the Zoo.”

“The Cuban Program,” as it became known, consisted of unrelenting beatings and physical and psychological tortures. As a result, Air Force Lieutenant Colonel [Earl Glenn Cobeil](#), age 36, lost his mind and bodily functions and was last seen alive on October 1970 at a prison in North Vietnam.



Armando Alejandro, Mario de la Peña, and Carlos Alberto Costa

[Armando Alejandro](#), age 45, [Carlos Alberto Costa](#), age 29, and [Mario de la Peña](#), age 24, were killed on February 24, 1996 when Cuban MIGs shot down over international waters the two civilian planes in which they were carrying out a humanitarian search and rescue mission. 29-year old [Pablo Morales](#), a Cuban resident of the US. was also killed.