**Cuba Arrested Nearly 500 Political Dissidents During Obama Visit**

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http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/04/06/obama-visit-sends-arbitrary-arrests-cuba-soaring-1416-march/

“These sorts of visits bring a lot of collateral damage,” Cuban pro-democracy activist Marta Beatriz Roque lamented in anticipation of President Barack Obama’s trip to the island. With the visit complete, new data has emerged clarifying exactly how much collateral damage. [498 arrests](http://www.capitolhillcubans.com/2016/04/over-1416-political-arrests-in-march.html) occurred during President Obama’s visit, adding to a total of 1416 in March.

The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), an NGO dedicated to tracking the rates of politically-motivated and/or arbitrary arrests on the island, [has issued its monthly report](http://iclep.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Informe-de-la-CCDHRN-Marzo-2016.pdf) showing March to have been the most active month for political arrests in 2016 so far. 2016 generally has been an especially active year for Cuban oppression, and the number of arrests have not fallen under 1100 in the first three months. For comparison, only 610 politically-motivated arrests were documented in March 2015, and only one month had an arrest rate over 1,100: November.

The CCDHRN notes that the rate of arrest for March 2016 is “the highest of its kind of abuse for the month in the Western Hemisphere and much of the world currently.” There have been nearly 4,000 politically-motivated arrests in Cuba in 2016, though the organization notes it is “sure that the real numbers are much higher throughout the island, as it is impossible to have a complete figure given the opaque and closed nature of the ruling regime in Cuba for the past six decades.”

The report also specifically identifies President Obama’s visit to the island as an aggravating factor. “Instead of assuring an atmosphere of civilian peace, a true wave of police oppression consisting of innumerable intimidating actions was unleashed,” resulting in 498 arrests while President Obama was present. This number is nearly [double the number of arrests](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/09/24/dissident-group-250-cubans-arrested-during-pope-francis-visit/) occurring during Pope Francis’s visit to Cuba in September 2015.

There appear to be two major driving factors in making the rate of arrests so high: the number of arrests occurring to prevent the free practice of Christianity during the month of Easter and the repeated arrests of a number of opposition leaders who insisted on continuing their pro-democracy activity. Hundreds of arrests involving the Ladies in White group — a dissident group consisting of relatives of political prisoners who attend Catholic Mass together on Sundays — were documented. Most involved keeping the women from publicly attending Mass. On Good Friday, dozens of Ladies in White were arrested “to impede their attendance at the Stations of the Cross Procession.” Two were described as “severely beaten.”

The leader of the Ladies in White organization, Berta Soler, was arrested eight times in March, twice a week.

Hundreds were arrested for attending activities described by the CCDHRN as “welcoming President Barack Obama” to Cuba. The report also sheds light on one arrest caught on camera: that occurring before the eyes of ESPN reporter Bob Ley, after activist Yasel Rivero Boni ran up to the camera and [yelled “down with the Castros”](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/03/24/meet-the-cuban-dissident-arrested-live-on-espn/) before being hauled away. Six people were arrested in connection to that incident.

Others were arrested in response to no activity whatsoever. In the city of Santa Clara, Maikel Armenteros Orama and Osney Quintana García were arrested “for being suspected of having placed an anti-government sign in a publicly visible place.”

Zaqueo Báez, an activist made world-famous after being filmed beaten and arrested in front of Pope Francis, [was arrested](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/03/20/violent-arrests-of-pro-democracy-activists-precede-obama-landing-in-cuba/) shortly before President Obama’s arrival to the island “on suspicion of potentially planning opposition activities.” He remained under house arrest until President Obama left.

Many of those arrested have been critics of President Obama. [In February](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/02/19/cuban-dissidents-obama-visit-will-cause-a-lot-of-collateral-damage/), the head of the dissident group Estado de SATS Antonio Rodiles described the president’s planned visit as “giving the Castro regime a pat on the back.” After being physically attacked the Sunday before President Obama’s arrival, Rodiles told international media that some of his colleagues had “fractures and contusions,” and that Cuban state police “[hit us with everything](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/03/20/violent-arrests-of-pro-democracy-activists-precede-obama-landing-in-cuba/).”

He was arrested six times in March. Berta Soler [lamented before the trip](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/03/22/white-house-releases-list-of-cuban-dissidents-meeting-with-obama/), “this won’t help us at all.” She eventually met with President Obama personally before he went on to [attend a baseball game with Raúl Castro](http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/03/22/president-obama-does-the-wave-with-castro-during-baseball-game-in-cuba/).