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Cuba authorities urged to stop harassing dead activist's family

Amnesty International has urged Cuban authorities to end the harassment of relatives of a human rights activist who died during a hunger strike last year.

Reina Luisa Tamayo, whose son Orlando Zapata Tamayo died at a Havana prison in February 2010, told Amnesty International she was arrested by state security agents who threatened to stop her and other mourners from commemorating the anniversary of Orlando's death in church, on 23 February.

"The fact that the Cuban authorities have so far failed to initiate an investigation into Orlando's death is outrageous and preventing his family from properly celebrating his life is a scandal," said Javier Zuñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

Tamayo, 72, her husband and another activist, Daniel Mesa, were forcefully detained on Friday 18 February by more than a dozen local security agents as they were walking around their village in Banes, north-west Cuba. Tamayo and her husband were released 12 hours later and Mesa, two days later.

Tamayo said the agents had threatened to prevent her leaving her home and go to the cemetery where her son is buried, in breach of her human rights.

"The recent releases of activists in Cuba, who shouldn't have been put in prison in the first place, will only be meaningful if, once all activists are released, they are able to carry out their legitimate work defending human rights without fear of reprisals," said Javier Zuñiga.

"The harassment suffered by people like Orlando Tamayo's relatives clearly goes to show that things still have not changed in Cuba and the authorities need to do much more to ensure human rights are a reality for all."

Orlando Zapata Tamayo was arrested in March 2003 and sentenced to three years in prison in May 2004 for "disrespect", "public disorder" and "resistance".

He was subsequently tried several times on further charges of "disobedience" and "disorder in a penal establishment" - the last time in May 2009 - and was serving a 36 year-sentence at the time of his death in prison.

Reina Tamayo said she intends to live in exile in the USA along with a number of her relatives and has been granted all relevant documents by the US authorities.

The Cuban government has yet to issue the necessary permits.