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Ms. Mary Lawlor

Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland*Via email:* hrc-sr-defenders@un.org, hrc-sr-health@un.org

Dear Ms. Lawlor and Ms. Mofokeng,

I am writing on behalf of the Human Rights Foundation (“HRF”). We are a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting democracy.

I am writing to bring your attention to the case of Omara Ruiz Urquiola, a Cuban national who has been refused reentry back home after receiving medical treatment in the United States. Ruiz Urquiola is a renowned academic and was awarded a grant which allowed her to secure a nonimmigrant visa to enter the United States. Her sole purpose for traveling to the United States was to obtain urgent medical care for her cancer, as it was increasingly more difficult for her to receive the necessary treatment in Cuba.

Ruiz Urquiola always intended to return to Cuba after getting treated, which took longer than expected due to health complications. But when she was well enough to leave the United States and return to the island, she was prevented from boarding a Southwest Airlines flight from Fort Lauderdale, Florida to Havana, Cuba on June 25, 2022. She then tried again on July 12th and was again forbidden from boarding the plane. Ruiz Urquiola was informed by Southwest Airlines personnel that they had received an email from Cuban immigration which stated that there was a ban against her reentering Cuba. However, the airline representatives told Omara that they could not share the communication with her.

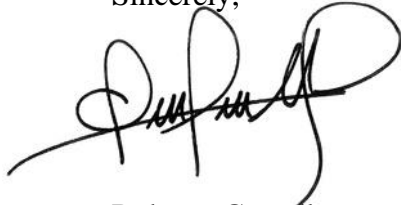
Ruiz Urquiola believes the ban against her was put in place due to her dissident activism towards the Cuban healthcare system and periodic collaboration with the San Isidro Movement (MSI). MSI is a group that protests the Cuban

regime's censorship over artistic expression. Her brother, Ariel Ruiz Urquiola, is a well-known dissident who was arrested and sentenced to twelve months in prison in 2018 after denouncing unsustainable fishing practices of sea turtles and conducting a hunger strike aimed at securing cancer treatment for Omara. He was thereafter transferred to a hospital in the city of Pinar del Río where he was inoculated with HIV. Omara supports her brother and believes that their relationship and her complaints about the healthcare system are other reasons why she has been banned from returning to Cuba.

We believe that you as Special Rapporteurs must investigate this egregious case. Cuba is violating its international obligations by restricting Omara's freedom of movement and right of return in retaliation for her critical stance against the government. Moreover, Omara is a Cuban citizen. If healthcare is to be provided by a State in this case, it should be Cuba. By forbidding her to return home, the Cuban State is also preventing her from being able to receive medical treatment in Cuba. Omara traveled to the United States to seek medical treatment, and she has the right to return to her home country, as recognized under international law.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I would be happy to provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Roberto González
Chief Advocacy Officer
Human Rights Foundation