

Activist offers his vision of new freedoms for Cuba's constitution

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HAVANA - (AP) -- Activist Oswaldo Payá presented a proposal Wednesday for a new constitution with expanded freedoms for Cubans, calling for the right to criticize the government and operate private businesses.

The 170-page document, compiled by Payá's Christian Liberation Movement with input from Cubans on and off the island, contains a blueprint for a modified constitution and new electoral laws and rules of association.

It was considered highly unlikely that Cuba's communist government would heed the call for change. There was no immediate comment from authorities.

Copies of the proposal were released to international journalists exactly four years after Payá delivered to Cuba's parliament the first batch of 25,000 signatures gathered for his Varela Project. Payá's earlier democracy drive gained international recognition and prompted the government to declare socialism "irrevocable."

The latest document was produced after two years of discussions with Cubans on issues that included education, health, religion, the economy and freedom of expression. Thousands participated in the effort, said Payá, whose group called for a popular vote on the proposed changes.

Propaganda and confiscation of private property are among things prohibited in the proposed constitution.

The right to own a business and criticize those in power are among the expanded rights.

"No one can be antagonized because of their opinions or criticisms, even if these are directed against the government, government officials or any other person or sector of the society," the document says.