

# U.N. expert cites Cuban censorship

## A human rights report citing Cuban censorship and the repression of political action sparked an angry denial.

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**GENEVA** - Cuba has failed to improve its human rights record, a U.N. expert said Tuesday, citing censorship, the imprisonment of political activists, and restrictions on rights campaigners as particular concerns.

"The situation doesn't seem today to be anything that could be described as improved, and I'm putting it mildly," Christine Chanet told the 47-nation U.N. Human Rights Council.

Cuba immediately slammed the report as libelous, and accused Chanet of double standards, selectivity and political manipulation.

Chanet, a French lawyer who reports to the council on a mandate carried over from the discontinued Human Rights Commission, said she had been hampered in her work by Cuban authorities' refusal to cooperate with her.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

However, Chanet said that by working with other experts, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, her mission had been able to gather enough information to be able to make recommendations. These include stopping prosecution of opponents of the communist regime, lifting laws on freedom of expression and movement, and allowing human rights organizations to enter and work in Cuba.

Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Juan Fernández Palacios, responded by saying that the greatest contribution Chanet could make to human rights in the future would be to quit her post. He accused her of ignoring the effects of the U.S. embargo on the island state, saying the U.N. expert was "serving the interests of a fascist clique."

Actually, Chanet had explicitly criticized in her report the "severe restrictions caused by a disastrous embargo, exacerbated in 2004 by unbearable restrictions on the movement of persons and goods."

Warren W. Tichenor, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva, said, "Cuba trumpets its human rights record, but tragically, it does not protect or promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its own citizens."

The Cuban government, he said, is maintaining "a repressive and totalitarian state that deprives the Cuban people of the right to express dissent without the risk of incurring a decades-long prison sentence."

The United States has had economic sanctions against Cuba since President John F. Kennedy imposed them in 1963, four years after Fidel Castro came to power.

### CRITICAL REACTION

Chanet's report prompted strong criticism from the envoys of China, North Korea, Russia, Iran, Belarus, Algeria, and Zimbabwe, all of whom accused the rights mission of double standards and called for the practice country-specific reports to be scrapped.

Only the European Union, the United States and Vietnam supported the report, prompting Havana's envoy to accuse the EU of helping maintain secret prisons for the CIA, and Washington of committing "barbarous acts" at its detention center in Guantánamo.