

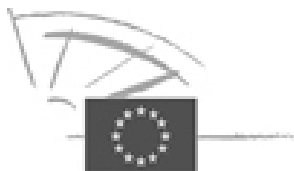
**Sakharov Prize Laureate 2005
Ladies in White
at the European Parliament**

HRAC documentation for AFET-DEVE-DROI joint meeting on 23-4-2013

AWARD OF THE SAKHAROV PRIZE TO THE DAMAS DE BLANCO
Sakharov Laureate 2005

CONTENTS

- The Damas de Blanco Delegation to the EP: short biographies
- The Damas de Blanco: background
- The Sakharov Prize Laureates from Cuba
- Background note on Cuba
- European Parliament resolutions:
 - of 11 March 2010 on prisoners of conscience in Cuba
 - of 21 June 2007 on Cuba
 - of 2006 on the EU's policy towards the Cuban Government
 - of 2004 Situation in Cuba



Ms. Berta de los Ángeles Soler Fernández
President of the Damas de Blanco in Cuba

Ms Soler co-founded the Ladies in White together with Laura Pollán and others, and has taken over the leadership of the group since Ms Pollán's death in 2011.

A microbiology technician born in 1963, she is married to Angel Moya Acosta, a construction worker and dissident, founder of the Alternative Option Movement.



Angel Moya was arrested in the Black Spring crackdown of 2003 and later sentenced to 20 years in prison. Ms Soler took up the defence of her husband, becoming a founding member of the Damas de Blanco and marching peacefully dressed in white down Havana's streets on Sundays calling for the release of political prisoners.

In October 2004, Ms Soler and the Damas de Blanco staged a rare protest in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución to urge the government to allow Mr Moya to be given an operation for a herniated disc. After two days of protest, ended by force, and a letter to then President Fidel Castro, Mr Moya was operated. He was reportedly made to leave prison in February 2011 after initially refusing to leave unless other prisoners from his group who had medical problems were released first. He is now living on probation in Cuba as he refused exile from the island. In February 2011 he was denied a passport, despite the lifting of restrictions on travel by the Cuban authorities.

Ms Soler is currently campaigning in different countries to garner support for reform in Cuba. On obtaining a passport in February 2013, she immediately declared her intention to visit the European Parliament and receive the Sakharov Prize awarded to the Damas de Blanco in 2005.

Ms Belkis Cantillo Ramírez - Damas de Blanco (Cuba)

Ms Cantillo Ramirez, born in 1969, has been a non-violent dissident since 1997. She has participated in protests and has been beaten and detained several times by the Cuban authorities. She was actively involved in gathering signatures for the Varela project for the reform of laws in Cuba, launched by Oswaldo Payá, Sakharov Laureate of 2002.



When her husband, José Daniel Ferrer García, was imprisoned in March 2003, she became part of the Damas de Blanco, travelling from her home in the province of Santiago de Cuba to Havana with her three small children to demand freedom for all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners. She was threatened with judicial action and losing her children for her activism.

She continues to live in Cuba with her husband, who refused to leave the island for exile in Spain. José Daniel Ferrer García, was the last of the Black Spring prisoners, together with Felix Navarro Rodriguez, to be released in March 2011. He had been condemned to a 25 year sentence. Mr Ferrer García is the coordinator of the *Unión Patriótica de Cuba* (UNPACU), and had previously been the general coordinator of the *Movimiento Cristiano Liberación* and a member of the managing committee for the Varela Project in Santiago de Cuba.

Ms Laura María Labrada Pollán



Ms Labrada Pollán is the daughter of Laura Inés Pollán Toledo, the co-founder and former President of the Damas de Blanco, who died in October 2011. Ms Labrada Pollán is an active member of the Damas, who is supporting Berta Soler in her leadership of the movement and working to include younger generations in its membership.

Laura Pollán co-founded the movement in protest against the detention of her husband, Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, with other wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of activists imprisoned in the Black Spring of 2003.

Mr Maseda, a nuclear engineer, journalist and a co-founder and the current president of the unofficial Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba, was sentenced to 20 years in jail. He was reportedly forcibly expelled from prison in February 2011 as he wanted to be exonerated or pardoned from the charges against him rather than simply granted parole. Mr Maseda was one of the few dissidents, of a group of 52 defended by the Catholic Church in Cuba and the Spanish government, who refused to go into exile.

Ms Blanca Reyes Castañón

President of the *Asociación Damas de Blanco* in Spain



Wife of the famous poet, journalist and former prisoner of conscience Raúl Rivero who was sentenced detained during the infamous Black Spring and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment, Blanca Reyes was one of the women behind the creation of the Damas de Blanco. She became an indefatigable defender of freedom of expression in Cuba, as an active member of the pacifist movement dedicated to the defence of the innocence of her husband and fellow prisoners of conscience.

Ms Reyes currently lives in Madrid and is the representative and spokesperson for the Ladies in White in Europe.

She has represented the Damas de Blanco for the Sakharov Prize awarded to the Damas de Blanco in 2005 and also received the International Award for Human Rights from the Cuban Hispanic Foundation on behalf the same in 2005.

She advocates the use of mobile phones and internet to fight repression in Cuba. She believes that many young people are now emerging to fight for their freedoms all over the island.

Elena Larrinaga

Secretary of the *Asociación Damas de Blanco* in Spain

Elena Larrinaga was born in Havana, Cuba, but immigrated to Spain at the age of 15. She is the president of the non-governmental organization *Observatorio Cubano de derechos humanos* (Cuban Observatory of Human Rights) which is based in Madrid and campaigns for the promotion of human rights and democracy in Cuba, running programmes to inform Cuban citizens about their fundamental rights. Ms Larrinaga is also a member of the board of the International Platform for Humans Rights in Cuba, and President of the Spanish Federation of Cuban Associations. She has founded the “Díario de Cuba” (Cuba Diary), an independent website providing up-to-date information about the human rights situation in Cuba.



**Sakharov Prize Laureate 2005
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at the European Parliament**

The DAMAS DE BLANCO: background

The Ladies in White from Cuba were one of the three Laureates of the Sakharov Prize in 2005. With the award, the European Parliament recognised their courage and commitment to the cause of human rights in Cuba and drew attention to the continuing detention of the 75 political dissidents imprisoned since March 2003, most for simply criticising the lack of political freedom in the country. In Cuba, speaking out against the government is a subversive act punished by up to 25 years in prison. Any attempt to consign the prisoners to oblivion failed thanks to their wives, mothers and daughters who brought international attention to their situation through their peaceful protests. They call themselves the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) and were formed as a spontaneous movement in early 2004. They are not a political party or bound to a political organisation of any type. By wearing white to symbolise innocence and purity they reflect the tactic used by mothers in 1970s Argentina to demand information about their missing children. These women, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, won the Sakharov Prize in 1992. Every Sunday, the Ladies in White attend religious services in the Church of Santa Rita, after which they peacefully walk down Havana's Fifth Avenue, flowers in hand, calling for the liberation of their loved ones and for all those arbitrarily incarcerated on the island. Initially, they started writing letters to the Cuban authorities but they did not get a single reply. When their protest started, it was the first time in 47 years that women in Cuba had gone out into the streets to protest against unjust imprisonment.

Despite having been threatened and insulted, the Ladies in White continue to stand up for the rights of Cuban political prisoners and the dignity of all Cuban people. Their demand for justice and their call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners is carried forward by a peaceful struggle. They are united in their anguish in the face of the appalling conditions their loved ones are suffering as

prisoners. The Ladies in White have called for solidarity amongst all peoples for their cause.

Five women: Laura Pollán, Miriam Leiva, Berta Soler, Loyda Valdés and Julia Núñez, were selected by the group to receive the Prize on behalf of the Ladies in White at the ceremony of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Cuban authorities did not authorise the representatives to leave the country to receive the Prize in Strasbourg. They were represented instead by Blanca Reyes, one of their activists currently living in Spain.

In October 2011, Laura Pollán, a one of the founders and chosen representatives of the Ladies in White, died.

THE BLACK SPRING OF 2003 IN CUBA

The 18th of March 2003 dawned with the launch of a massive crackdown on dissidents in Cuba. A total of 75 journalists, librarians human rights and democracy activists were jailed over seven days of arrests, coincided to time with the US invasion of Iraq. The dissidents were charged under Article 91 of the Penal Code on acts against the Independence or the Territorial Integrity of the State, and Law 88 for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy, and condemned to jail sentences ranging from 10 to 25 years.

In July 2010 President Raul Castro, who had taken over from Fidel Castro in 2006, agreed in a deal brokered by the Catholic Church, to free the 52 people then still behind bars from the 2003 crackdown. Raul Castro told Catholic leaders that he wanted to clear prisons of political inmates and released several other prisoners besides the 52. A small number of the detained Black Spring dissidents, including Hector Maseda Gutierrez, Angel Moya Acosta and José Daniel Ferrer García, refused to be exiled to Spain and continue living in Cuba under probation. Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia and Felix Navarro Rodriguez were the last two of the Black Spring prisoners to be released, in March 2011.

The Black Spring prisoners became a rallying point for human rights activists and the opposition in Cuba, but were by no means the only prisoners of conscience on the island. Scores of other dissidents were detained before and after the Black Spring. Estimates vary widely.