

People in Need

CZECH REPUBLIC



Attention: Award Nomination
1001 de Maisonneuve Blvd. East,
Suite 1100, Montreal (Quebec) Canada H2L 4P9

April 14, 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

With this letter, we would like to nominate Mr Dagoberto Valdés of Cuba for the 2006 John Humphrey Freedom Award. Mr Valdes, and the organizations he founded and runs (the Center for Civil and Religious Education and *Vitral* magazine), embody the courage and dedication to the protection of human rights and the development of democracy that the John Humphrey Freedom Award strives to recognize.

Dagoberto Valdes is one of the most important examples of activism and civic involvement in Cuba. Few speak out against the Cuban regime yet Dagoberto Valdes has chosen to engage in a constant and eloquent critique of the Castro regime. He has demonstrated selflessness and compassion in his pursuit of civic and social rights for the people of his country, despite the repression and acts of repudiation carried out against him by the Cuban government.

Space in which individuals can meet and opinion can be voiced is rare in Cuba but essential to its democratic development. Dagoberto Valdes has devoted his life to providing space on the island to speak and associate freely and uncensored by the regime through the establishment of the *Civic and Religious Training Center (CFCR)* and *Vitral* magazine. Mr Valdes has been recognized for his work by Pope John Paul, who appointed him to the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in 1999, and by Vaclav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic.

Throughout his life, Mr Valdes has repeatedly demonstrated commitment to his beliefs despite the threat of persecution and repression by the Cuban government. On the basis of his religion, he was denied the opportunity at university to engage in his selected studies, permission to receive his Doctorate or to pursue a professorship. His commitment to his faith soon also developed into the commitment to help ensure basic freedoms for the people of Cuba. In 1993, he founded *Vitral*, a magazine of essays and articles on the prevalent issues, religious or otherwise, in Cuba. In response, all of those involved in the magazine lost their jobs. Mr Valdes lost his job as president of a state-owned tobacco plant and was demoted to the position of fieldhand, with long days of manual back-breaking work. Nevertheless, his belief in the right of all Cubans to speak freely, to associate freely and to have access to information has driven him to continue his work. *Vitral* magazine is now one of the leading opposition magazine in Cuba, with distribution of approx. 6000 copies every two months.

Established in 1993, the *CFCR* brings individuals together on a weekly basis for uncensored discussion, educational courses and seminars on issues otherwise suppressed by the state. Participants have the opportunity to learn about and subsequently voice their opinions in an open manner on issues such as human rights, international law, civic rights and representative democracy. The Center is unregistered and illegal in the eyes of the regime. Mr Valdes also founded *Vitral* in the same year to provide an open forum for essays, articles and critiques, focusing on various aspects of religion, civil society and politics. The magazine is made under rudimentary conditions in the local diocese offices. Each issue takes six people approximately a month to print and collate.

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The work of Dagoberto Valdes is vital in a society where the population is routinely denied the right to speak openly, to associate freely and to access independent information. By raising the awareness of Cubans of their civic and human rights, Mr Valdes has provided them with something no-one else can: an alternative way of viewing their life, their future and the responsibilities of their government. He has operated successfully as an independent journalist for over 13 years in a country which does not support the freedom of expression. Nevertheless, his dedication and his belief in the duty of the Catholic Church to engage in political and social dialogue have inspired others around him to increase their activism.

Many of those who voice their opinion in Cuba find themselves harassed by the state or imprisoned. Repression against those who speak out are becoming increasingly severe. In March 2003, the Cuban government arrested 75 members of the democratic opposition, journalists, librarians and trade unions representatives and sentenced them to between 10 and 28 years in prison. As a result, many other activists fled the country or went into exile. The John Humphrey Freedom Award would both recognize the importance of the work of Dagoberto Valdes but would also protect him from further persecution at the hands of the Cuban authorities.

It is for these reasons that we wish to nominate Mr Dagoberto Valdes of Cuba for the 2006 John Humphrey Freedom Award. We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

People in Need, Prague (nominating organization)

Supported by:

People in Peril, Slovakia
Freedom House, Hungary
Swedish International Liberal Center, Sweden
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Luis Alberto Lacalle, President of Uruguay (1990-1995)
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Rexhep Meidani, former president of the Republic of Albania (1997-2002)
Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia (1989-2003)
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