



## World Youth Movement for Democracy

### **Statement on Death of Cuban Prisoner of Conscience, Wilman Villar Mendoza**

**January 25, 2012**

The World Youth Movement for Democracy holds the Cuban dictatorship responsible for the death of a young Cuban prisoner of conscience, demands an independent investigation, and extends condolences to the immediate family.

On November 14, 2011, Wilman Villar Mendoza, a member of the non-violent civic group, Cuban Patriotic Union, was unjustly beaten and imprisoned for exercising his fundamental rights of free expression in a nonviolent public demonstration. State Security had previously made threats to Villar, urging him to leave the group.

Ten days later, Villar was sentenced to four years in prison in a closed-door sham trial at the Contramaestre Municipal Tribunal. Villar was denied due process and was immediately transferred to the Aguadores prison. On that same day, he began a hunger strike to protest the injustices committed against him.

Cuban authorities responded by confining Villar to a punishment cell without clothes or water in an effort to break his spirit and force him to end the hunger strike. It was only when it appeared that Villar would die, that prison officials transferred him to a hospital on January 15, 2012 day 63 of the hunger strike.

On that same Sunday, 17 Ladies in White were brutally beaten and detained as they marched from the Cobre to Juan Bruno Zayas hospital, calling for Wilman Villar Mendoza's release. Fifteen Cuban Patriotic Union activists were also beaten and detained during the march.

Cuban prisoner of conscience Wilman Villar Mendoza died of multiple organ failure caused by pneumonia and generalized sepsis four days later at 6:30pm, in the city of Santiago de Cuba while in the custody of the Cuban prison authorities. He was 31 years old.

Wilman Villar Mendoza is not the first prisoner of conscience to die in Cuban custody under similar circumstances. Another prisoner of conscience, Orlando Zapata Tamayo, was jailed in March 2003 during the "Black Spring" crackdown against opposition groups. He died in prison on February 23, 2011, after enduring cruel and unusual punishment and an 85-day hunger strike protesting the torture and unjust imprisonment.

Both Wilman Villar Mendoza and Orlando Zapata Tamayo were subjected to isolation in a punishment cell, confined without clothing, deprived of water and medical assistance, and transferred to a medical facility only when they were in a critical state of health.

The World Youth Movement for Democracy holds the Cuban dictatorship responsible for the death of Wilman Villar Mendoza and calls for an independent investigation to identify the officials responsible for his death and hold them accountable. The World Youth Movement also urges the Cuban government to stop its harassment of Cuban citizens for exercising their fundamental right to free expression and assembly. The World Youth Movement for Democracy also extends its heartfelt condolences to his wife, Maritza Pelegrino Cabrales and his two small daughters.

*Signed by World Youth Movement for Democracy*