



**Formal Contribution to the Fifth Session of the Permanent Forum of
People of African Descent**

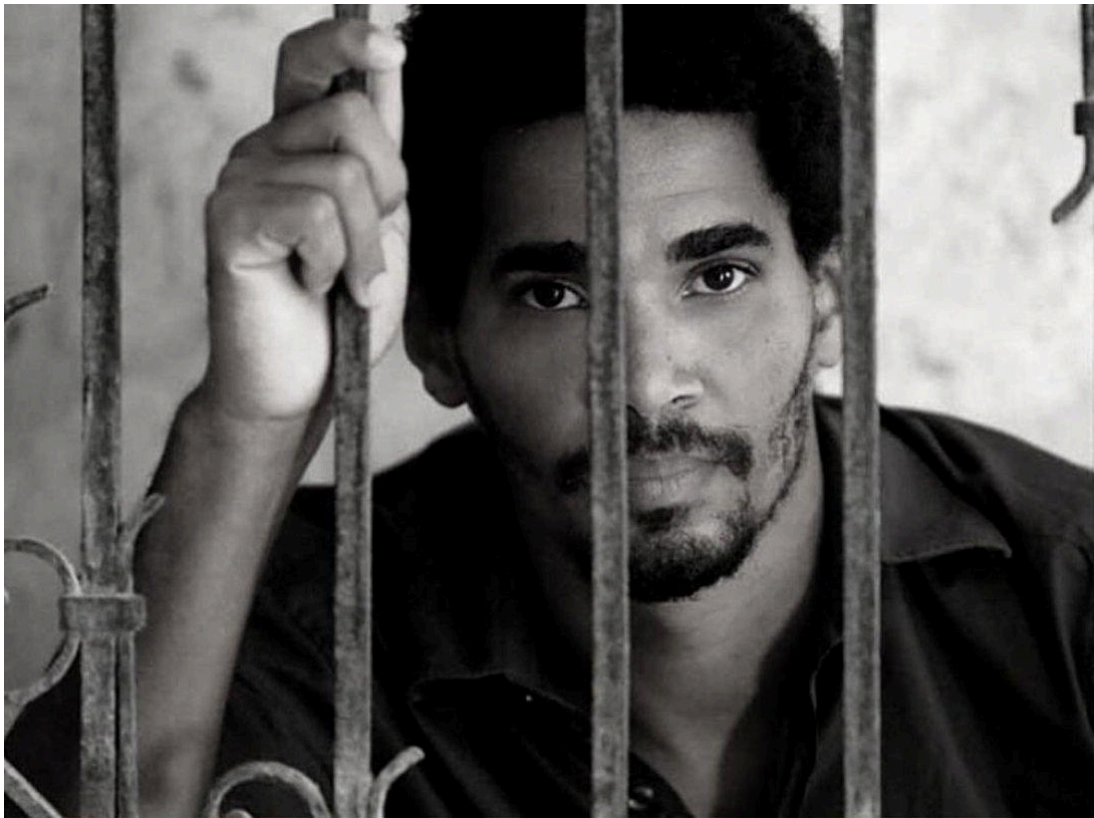


Photo: Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, artist, political prisoner in Cuba

April 14-17, 2026 - United Nations, Geneva

**Submitted by: Léo Juvier-Hendrickx on behalf of the EU-Cuba Network for
Democracy**

Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum,

The EU-Cuba Network for Democracy expresses its appreciation for the important work undertaken by the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, particularly its continued efforts to advance recognition, justice, and development for people of African descent worldwide.

We commend the Forum's engagement in promoting the principles reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, as well as its broader commitment to addressing the enduring consequences of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racial discrimination. These efforts remain essential to building a more just and inclusive international order.

Our organisation reiterates its willingness to contribute constructively to the work of the Forum, including through dialogue, documentation, and advocacy in support of Afro-descendant communities, including Afro-Cubans and the wider African diaspora.

Concerns Regarding Civic Space and Participation

At the same time, we wish to raise serious concerns regarding the shrinking civic space in certain Member States, including Cuba.

As a Member State of the United Nations, Cuba has an obligation to uphold the principles of participation, inclusion, and respect for civil society engagement. However, the reality on the ground, and within international fora, indicates otherwise.

We have observed that:

- Independent civil society from Cuba continues to face systematic repression, including harassment, arbitrary detention, and restrictions on freedom of expression;
- Afro-Cuban activists and independent voices are disproportionately affected, limiting their ability to participate meaningfully in global discussions on racial justice;
- During the Fifth Session of this Forum, there were clear instances in which representatives aligned with the Cuban state sought to interrupt or undermine independent civil society voices, restricting their ability to speak freely.

Such actions are incompatible with the spirit and mandate of this Forum, which seeks to amplify, not silence, the voices of people of African descent.

Call for Protection of Civil Society

In light of these concerns, we respectfully call for the development of a stronger international framework to protect civil society participation within United Nations mechanisms.

This framework should aim to:

- Ensure that civil society representatives can engage freely, safely, and without fear of reprisals;
- Establish clear safeguards against intimidation, disruption, or interference by state actors;
- Strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms for reprisals linked to participation in UN processes;
- Guarantee equal and meaningful access for independent organisations, particularly those representing marginalized Afro-descendant communities.

The ability to **speak truth to power** is fundamental to the credibility and effectiveness of international human rights mechanisms.

Recognition, Justice, and Reparations

We reaffirm the importance of continuing along the path of recognition and reparatory justice for people of African descent.

This includes:

- Addressing the historical and structural legacies of the transatlantic slave trade;
- Advancing policies that promote equality, dignity, and inclusion for Afro-descendant populations;
- Ensuring that Afro-Cuban communities are not excluded from these global processes due to political repression or lack of representation.

The pursuit of reparations must be inclusive, participatory, and grounded in the lived realities of affected communities.

Ending remark

The work of this Forum is vital. However, its success depends on the ability of all voices, especially independent civil society to participate without fear.

We stand ready to continue contributing to this important process and to work alongside the Forum in advancing justice, dignity, and human rights for people of African descent.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Cordially,

Léo Juvier-Hendrickx

EU-Cuba Network for Democracy
Brussels, European Union

www.Cubanetwork.eu

Diplomacy@Cubanetwork.eu

+32 493 96 49 79