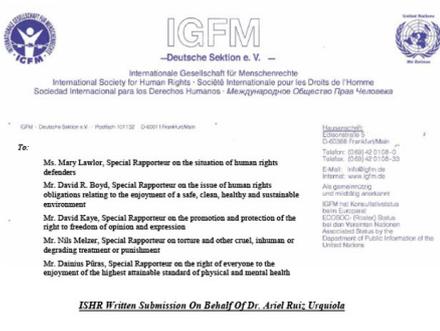


## NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA



For years, the Cuban government has comprehensively violated the human rights of the scientist, biologist and environmentalist Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola. His scientific career was torpedoed by the government for many years, his property was damaged and his family threatened. Now the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) has called on the relevant special rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council to investigate the case. Here you can see Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola and ISHR spokesperson Martin Lessenthin.

## ISHR seeks monitoring of the case of Ariel Ruiz Urquiola by the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council

### Cuban regime responsible for HIV infection and other serious human rights violations by regime critic Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola



Frankfurt am Main / Geneva, July 1, 2020 – Justice for Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola: The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) has submitted a submission to the responsible Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. In it, the Frankfurt-based organization calls on the Special Rapporteurs to investigate the case of Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola, and to request that the Cuban Government take immediate steps to: (i) cease ongoing violations of Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola’s human rights; and (ii) remedy past breaches of Dr. Ruiz Urquiola’s human rights.

For many years, the Cuban biologist and environmentalist’s scientific career was torpedoed by the Government, his property was harmed, and his family threatened. In 2018, he was arbitrarily arrested, sentenced to prison, and there is convincing evidence that, either through the intentional acts of the Cuban Government or as a result of its serious negligence, he was infected with the HIV while in prison. “For years, the Cuban regime has severely violated the human rights of Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola. The Cuban Government’s actions must be acknowledged by the international community, and those responsible must finally be held accountable – Ariel deserves justice”, explains Martin Lessenthin, spokesman of the German Section of ISHR.

ISHR sees such monitoring as a sign of hope for civil rights activists in Cuba and in this context also refers to the mysterious circumstances of the deaths of numerous regime critics. “A pattern is emerging on the Caribbean island: those who stand up against the Cuban regime are not only discriminated against, persecuted and arrested, but also have to fear for their lives, are released from prison sick or – as in the case of Ariel – infected with a deadly virus,” ISHR said.

Comprehensive violations of human rights for years



Dr. Ariel Ruiz Urquiola is a distinguished Cuban scientist, biologist and environmentalist. He was a researcher at the University of Havana until 2016, where he gained national and international recognition for his research on environmental destruction in Cuba. As a result, state authorities regularly tried to revoke his teaching license and end his scientific career. Since 2001, he has been under constant surveillance by the Cuban government and is frequently attacked in a variety of ways. After he was expelled from university in 2016, he decided to live with his mother and sister on a biological farm in the Viñales region and set up a research facility there. His aim was to preserve the ecosystem of the Viñales National Park. However, his family, farm, and animals have been the subject of frequent attacks, to which the local authorities are either complicit in, or willfully blind to. Ariel reports that animals on the farm have been killed, his property and crops destroyed, and the water in the well poisoned. The family was also threatened to have their state livestock license revoked and charged with illegal occupation of the land.

Arbitrary arrest, detention, and conviction, and infection with HIV

Following an alleged insult to two forest rangers, Ariel Ruiz Urquiola was arrested in May 2018 and sentenced to 12 months in prison for insulting public officials in an unlawful trial - during which, among other things, exculpatory evidence was not admitted. After he staged a hunger protest for more than two weeks, he was released from prison to serve the remainder of his sentence under house arrest. Last year, Ariel learned that he is HIV positive. He strongly believes he was infected while in prison, and there is credible evidence to support this conclusion. Dr. Ruiz Urquiola is currently in Switzerland to treat his HIV. "In order not to lose his farm, Ariel will soon have to return to Cuba - then he will once again be in the sights of the Cuban



regime,” stresses the ISHR.

#### Whole family in the focus of persecution

The family of Ariel Ruiz Urquiola has long been a thorn in the side of the Cuban authorities. When Ariel was still a teenager, his father served a prison sentence as a political prisoner. The regime has further targeted Ariel’s sister Omara Ruiz Urquiola. After she had been wrongly treated, the civil rights activist found out that the mistakes were due to instructions from the Cuban Ministry of Health. Omara was also excluded from scientific events and eventually lost her job as professor of design and art at the University of Havana. She continues to live with her mother on the farm. Both are regularly bullied and threatened by the authorities.

#### Mysterious circumstances of the deaths of numerous regime critics

ISHR recalls at this point other regime critics, such as Laura Pollán and Oswaldo Paya. Laura Pollán, the founder of the “Ladies in White” officially died in hospital on 14 October 2011 as a result of respiratory disease and dengue fever. However, civil rights activists speak of “medical neglect”. On July 22, 2012, Oswaldo Payá, chairman of the banned party “Christian Liberation Movement” (MCL), was killed in an accident with his car together with Harold Cepero. He had previously received death threats several times. In both cases, the families, civil rights activists and human rights organizations such as ISHR assume that the Cuban government was involved in their death and wanted to eliminate the critics. That is why an independent investigation into the circumstances of his death has been called for.