

IRI STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF PROMINENT CUBAN DISSIDENT OSWALDO PAYÁ

Washington, DC – IRI was stunned and saddened at the news of the mysterious death of Cuban political activist Oswaldo Payá. Payá's death, along with another passenger, youth activist Harold Cepero Escalante, marks the second time in 10 months that a well-known Cuban dissident has died under suspicious circumstances.

Payá gained international prominence for the Varela Project, an initiative he began in 1998 to gather signatures from Cubans to petition the government for a referendum on laws to guarantee basic civil rights such as freedom of speech and assembly. This initiative is still widely viewed as one of the most courageous acts of public support demanding basic freedoms in Cuba. To many within Cuba and abroad, Payá was a symbol of the brave resistance against the Castros' state of control, fear and repression, which has lasted for more than half a century. Payá's efforts were recognized in 2002 when the European Parliament awarded him the [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#).

Sadly, the Castro regime's tight control over media and its blanket suppression of dissent prevented many Cubans from ever learning more about Payá or his work, and his dedication to bringing freedom to Cuba. Cuba's freedom will undoubtedly someday arrive, and when it does, Oswaldo Payá will be duly recognized as a patriot and a hero who contributed to that cause.

IRI's thoughts and prayers are with Payá's family and friends, and his compatriots with the Christian Liberation Movement.