

## **Meryl Streep, Zadie Smith and others sign letter demanding Cuban government stop persecuting artists**

The letter, signed by more than 300 well-known figures in the arts, adds pressure to calls for the Cuban government to let artists live and work freely

**Daniel Cassady**, 8 December 2021

A host of prominent figures in the arts have signed a letter demanding freedom for artists in Cuba, who over the last several months have experienced levels of harassment and persecution from the government that could be described as predatory.

“Cuban artists, including from the San Isidro, 27N and Archipiélago movements, have drawn domestic and international attention to the Cuban government’s callous disregard for human rights, partially laying the foundation for the massive protests that erupted across the country on 11 July 2021,” the letter states.

Co-signed by PEN International, the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) at PEN America and Human Rights Watch, the letter was also signed by more than 300 prominent figures in the arts including the actor Meryl Streep, writers Paul Auster and Zadie Smith, and the Cuban artists Tania Bruguera, Coco Fusco and Hamlet Lavastida.

Following the protests on 11 July the Cuban government targeted artists, writers and intellectuals who have criticised the lack of artistic freedom on the island. Hundreds have been detained since the protests, according to a spreadsheet kept by local activists. The artist Hamlet Lavastida was arrested in June after returning to Cuba from an artist residency in Germany and held for three months before being exiled from the island as a condition of his release. The artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, who was given “Icon” status in Time magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people, has been jailed for over a year.

“There is no justification for persecuting artists for peacefully expressing their views,” the letter states. “We call on the Cuban government to respect the fundamental role that art and artists play in society and immediately stop harassing artists for engaging in political and social critiques that are not in line with the government’s rigid ideology. Throwing artists in jail or exiling them from the country forever—in response to their art, words and ideas—is abusive and inhumane. We stand proudly in solidarity with Cuban artists. Art should be free from censorship and repression, in Cuba and everywhere.”