

## A Brave Man Takes on Cuba's Brutal Regime. Will the Pope Help?

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Oscar Biscet (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

“Police are in my house; bring summons for Oscar,” Tweeted [Elsa Morejon](#) at 11:50 Thursday morning from Havana. “Oscar” is her husband,

[Oscar Elias Biscet](#)

, the courageous

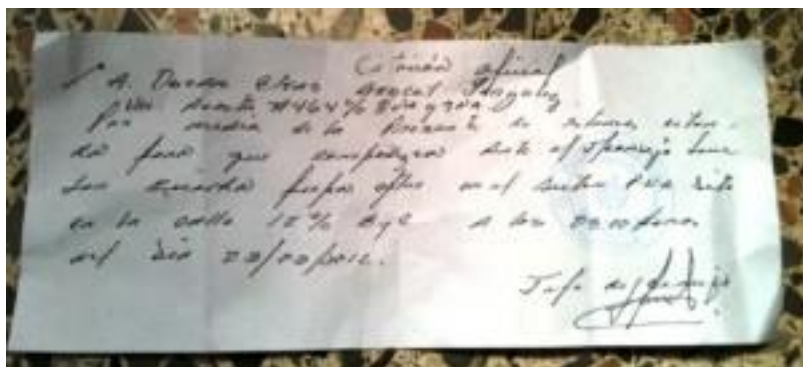
[physician](#)

who has spent 12 of his 50 years on earth in Fidel Castro’s prisons for expressing the opinion that Cubans should be free to speak their minds, to associate with whom they please, and to vote in fair elections.

On Wednesday, he voiced those opinions again in an [op-ed](#) in the [Wall Street Journal](#). “My country continues to be run by a brutal regime that oppresses the people, systematically violating our basic freedoms,” he wrote. “Cuba is a police state.... They beat and harass anyone seeking peaceful political change.”

Thus, a knock on the door, and the summons to appear at the police station Friday at 9 a.m.

Biscet responded as any brave person responds in the Internet age. He is not cowed. Within minutes, Biscet and his wife ensure that a [photo of the police](#) who came to his door and a copy of the [hand-written summons](#) are circulating around the world.



Handwritten summons issued to Oscar Biscet, March 22, 2012

Soon after, I learn from one of Biscet's supporters that Oscar has no intention of showing up at the police station. Biscet says, I am told, that "if he lived in a democracy, he would have to attend, but since he lives in a dictatorship and has not committed any crimes, he will not present himself."

Over the years, Biscet has been charged with committing such Orwellian offenses as "dangerousness," which is [defined](#) as a "special proclivity of a person to commit crimes demonstrated by his conduct in manifest contradiction of socialist norms."

In 2003, he was sent to prison, along with 74 other freedom advocates in Fidel's Black Spring round-up.

In his [Wall Street Journal piece](#), Biscet says he personally witnessed prisoners beaten to death for requesting medical attention, and three prisoners tried to assassinate him on two separate occasions. In 2007, while still in prison, he was awarded the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) by President George W. Bush. Almost exactly a year ago, he was [released](#)

Some of his comrades in these “living hells,” as Biscet calls Cuban prisons, were exiled to Spain with no chance to return under the Castro regime. Biscet chose to remain in Cuba and to continue speaking out

And he is asking for help. He wants [Pope Benedict XVI](#), who arrives in Havana Monday for a two-day visit, to pressure the Castros to hold free elections and allow Cubans their God-given rights. As Pope John Paul II did in Eastern Europe, Pope Benedict could be in the vanguard of winning freedom for the Cuban people.

So far, the prospects are not good. Cuba’s Cardinal, Jaime Ortega, with police help, recently evicted 13 dissidents who had camped out in a church “in an attempt to push the Pope to talk to the Castros about human rights,” according to a scathing [Washington Post editorial](#) that charged Cardinal Ortega with becoming “a de facto partner of Raul Castro.”

The good news is that Oscar Biscet – and many, many others like him on the island – are not giving up. Despite the Cuban regime’s efforts, they are acquiring the non-violent tools of communication to make their work more effective.

There are now about two million cell phones in Cuba for a population of 11 million people, a penetration rate that’s the lowest in the hemisphere – below even Haiti. [Mobile](#) phones are expensive to buy and to use (national calling rates are 45 cents a minute; equivalent to \$1.85 in the U.S.), but Cubans are resourceful and adept at lower-cost texting. They are also geniuses at tying illegal satellite dishes together to connect with the outside world.

Internet access is abysmal, but, again, Cuban dissidents are managing to get their Tweets to the outside world. A few days ago, for example, Yoanni Sanchez, Cuba's most famous blogger, [Tweeted](#) that Cuban authorities had cut off Biscet's [mobile phone](#) .

On Wednesday, the Heritage Foundation and [Google](#) sponsored a conference on “ [How the Internet Can Thaw an Island Frozen in Time](#) .” Among others, featured Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla); Jared Cohen, director of Google Ideas and my former State Department colleague; and Carlos Garcia Perez, who heads the Office of Cuba Broadcasting at the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Garcia Perez is pushing his organization beyond radio and television and into the Internet age, with text messages and other high-tech means to tell the Cubans what is happening in their own country and the world.

Can an island so close to the United States still, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, shut itself off from the kind of modern communications that will, inevitably, bring freedom? I doubt it seriously, and so did the members of the panel I moderated at the conference.

Cuba is at a tipping point. The Castros are deathly afraid. That's why they want to lock up [Alan Gross](#) , a 62-year old American, for 15 years for merely distributing communications equipment to [Cuban Jews](#) .

The Internet, mobile phones, satellite dishes, Facebook, Google, and Twitter cannot by themselves bring freedom to Cuba. But they are a means that did not exist a decade ago. Thanks to the courage of Óscar Biscet and many more like him, technology can push this oppressive regime over the edge.

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