

# Arrest that Black Woman!

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Testimony about one of Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera’s many arrests. She is a leader in the *Rosa Parks Feminist Movement for Civil Rights*, and the author’s wife.

“Arrest that ugly, complaining black woman!” shouted the leader of the uniformed guards, “arrest that ugly black woman,” insisted the voice, while young Melquíades Hernández was being brutally beaten.

“They’re going to kill that poor woman!” shouted a dark-skinned woman who watched the spectacle upon exiting one of Placetás’s stores. “Don’t hit her, you abusers. What you need to do is help her and not keep hitting the poor woman!”

Blood was oozing all over her face, which was now unrecognizable. A large official was beating her on the head with a *tonfa* [police club], another punched her, and yet another kicked her in the back. People watched in shock, in silence, but started to shout when the defenseless woman who had protested was attacked and violently arrested. “Woman, I need to receive my orders so I can kill all those nosey blacks who stick their noses into other people’s business!” shouted the police chief, Mayor Sergio Vilariño Hernández, at the police station, as he drove the prisoner. “Jorge Luis, I’ve been arrested, because I...” was the only thing she could tell me on her cell phone, taking advantage of a brief moment during which the police lieutenant was charging her. When I got to the station, I was told “Sit down. We had to arrest her, but we did not know she was your wife when we were arresting her...”

“May I know why she was arrested and what the charges against her are?”

“Look. Just a while ago we had to beat, that is, reduce to obedience a citizen who was drunk and disturbing the peace. Your wife, without knowing what was going on, began to insult us, shouting at us that we were abusers, and that we should give this person medical aid. We had to reduce her too, because she got unpleasant with us. She is charged with contempt, resisting arrest, and disobedience. She is still in jail, but don’t worry too much.”

“What do you mean, don’t worry too much? When may I see her?”

“After 24 hours from now, but I repeat, just stay calm. It may not be as serious as it seems.”

“Look, Mayor Villario...”

“Vilariño.”

“Look, Mayor Vilariño. Maybe this is not too serious for you, but it is for me. I know what it means when you say you’ve reduced a citizen to obedience, since I have a lot of experience in these...”

“Look, Antúnez. We are not here to discuss ideology...”

“No. That’s not my purpose here either. The deal is that folks that I encountered on my way over here told me they witnessed the event, and have assured me that my wife was badly and racistly beaten and insulted by the police. I



*Iris Tamara and “Antúnez”*

demand to hear from her own lips what happened, and that the shopping she had done, and her cell phone, be returned to me.”

“All the shopping will be returned to you, but my comrades at State Security have the cell phone.”

I went home with the shopping and went back to the police station the next day. I found that activist Blas Augusto Fortún Martínez was already there.

“How did you find out about this?”

“As you well know, I sleep with Radio Martí on. Early this morning I heard Juanita Isa’s report, but it was your voice. Look, here come some of our other brothers and sisters.”

Here came Loreto Hernández García, Donaida Pérez Paseiro, Amado Ruiz Moreno, Arturo Conde Zamora, and Dora Lara Morales. Idania Yáñez Contreras, the president of the *Central Oppositionist Coalition*, who was mobilizing the masses towards Placetas, from Santa Clara.

I had to go home for a minute, but when I got back, Blas informed me that the unit chief wanted to see me, to give me the cellphone and release Iris. The pressure and presence of my

oppositionist brothers and sisters helped end this ordeal in fewer than 24 hours.

As usual, we had to wait for the totally fixed proceeding at the municipal court in Placetas. Iris was finally charged with contempt, resisting arrest, disobedience, and fined 500 pesos—all this on top of the beating and insults she had received. The sentence was ratified, by appeal, at the Villa Clara provincial court.

More waiting followed the court’s decision—going to prison, since for reasons of dignity and principles Iris refused to pay the fine. Some of our oppositionist brothers and sisters suggested paying it, to avoid going to jail, but they all know this young black woman’s firmness. She is a peaceful defender of human rights who told the appeals court she had no intention of paying the fine, and kept right on protesting the abuse and violation of human rights. In the case of the woman they beat, both the police and the court that condemned her are guilty of both these things, and of discriminating against her because of the color of her skin.