

# “The Cuban Regime Has Kept Up It’s Racist Behavior”

## Interview with Berta Soler, Leader of the *Ladies in White*

José Hugo Fernández  
Writer and journalist  
Havana, Cuba



*Berta Soler attacked by pro-government mob*

Those who insist on saying purity is white should meet Berta Soler.

This black woman’s character is so impeccable one could almost say her soul was translucent.<sup>1</sup>

With no political vocation, but very solid, humanistic beliefs—something she inherited—Berta is the leader of the *Ladies in White*, the best-known organization involved

in a peaceful struggle against the dictatorship in Cuba.

Before the so-called Black Spring (2003), when 75 peaceful Cuban oppositionists were condemned to lengthy prison sentences at summary trials, she was just a humble employee with no other aspiration but to do good work as a mid-level microbiology technician, and raise two children in their poor but de-

cent home in Havana's Alamar neighborhood. Yet, the dramatic imprisonment of those innocents, among whom was her husband, Ángel Moya, caused a 180-degree turnabout in Berta's life, and that of her family.

As founder of the *Ladies in White*, an organization whose membership includes mothers, wives, daughters, and other family members of the Black Spring prisoners, Berta Soler devoted herself entirely to the struggle to free her husband and the rest. Some day, Cuba's history will have to devote a particularly substantial chapter to the work of these women, who emulate the bravest of Cuba's heroines from centuries past.

Today, her attitude back on October 4th, 2003, when she stood bravely before the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee's headquarters, at Revolution Square, is already legendary among Havana's residents. She demanded medical attention for her husband, who was ill and abandoned in an inhumane cell somewhere in the country's interior. She had publicly promised to remain there day and night till her husband was transferred to Havana, to undergo an urgent surgical intervention. And stay she did, for two days, and no one was able to move her from her place. Other *Ladies in White* supported her in her efforts. Finally, the regime had no other choice but to give in.

Her love and defense of her family's integrity have caused Berta Soler to become an outstanding political leader but—luckily for Cubans—neither God nor her heritage have allowed this seemingly humble but determined woman's visage to be overshadowed by the kind of ego that tends to typify politicians. This can easily be seen in the following, brief interview she gave *ISLAS*:

**José Hugo Fernández:** How do you see the situation of blacks within the economic

and moral crisis that is currently afflicting Cuban society? And, in general terms, what is the current position of black Cubans before the regime?

**Berta Soler:** At this time, blacks have the worst jobs in Cuba. Most poor and mentally alienated people we see on the streets of our country every day are African descendants. Most of the prison population is also black. This all indicates that the Cuban regime has kept this sector of the population marginalized for 53 years of this misnamed revolution. As far as our legal system is concerned, it is a crime to be black in Cuba. The Revolutionary National Police (PNR) constantly harasses blacks, contrary to the attitude of government forces, which use blacks as their main repressive weapon against the opposition, and against the population, in general. Nevertheless, a high number of blacks are active in (and leaders of) the opposition movement against the regime, which has cost them prison sentences.

**JFH:** Have you and your husband personally suffered manifestations of racism on the part of the regime? Or, have you been discriminated against solely for your political ideas?

**BS:** For more than 53 years, the Cuban regime has kept up a racist attitude, and because we take a contestatory position against its systematic violation of human rights, and we are black, we have been doubly victimized by the regime's political repression.

**JHF:** Have you ever received help, or just encouraging words from government representatives who project themselves as critics of racial discrimination?

**BS:** Ever since we decided to join the opposition, we have never received any help, advice or words of comfort from the regime's representatives who project themselves as critical of



*Berta Soler and other Ladies in White offering posthumous honors to Laura Pollán*

racial discrimination. On the contrary. Many of them have supported and planned repressive acts against us. On not too few occasions, they have even incited violence against us.

**JHF:** How do you and your husband—ex-prisoner of conscience and hero of the civil resistance against the dictatorship, Ángel Moya—manage to stay together and make sure your home is run properly, with all the rigors of the oppositionist struggle, and the regime’s harassment? How does the official media’s systematic campaign to discredit you affect you personally, with your children, family, friends and neighbors?

**BS:** Our relations at home are based on mutual respect. As far as the discrediting campaigns are concerned, they do not affect us because we are morally and spiritually healthy. We are not drug traffickers or criminals. Our behavior is modeled after the example of respecting family and community. We have taught our children and loved ones to respect

others and spoken to them very clearly about what repressive forces can do and what methods they employ.

**JHF:** What would you say to those supporters of the regime who believe you are an ingrate when you oppose a government that—according to them—has approved unprecedented laws to acknowledge your rights as a woman, and as a black woman?

**BS:** As a woman, and a black woman, I have a right to protest and fight when the freedom of my people is trampled by a government that betrayed the ideals and aspirations of Cubans, including, of course, those of women and blacks.

**Note:**

1. Upon the death of Laura Pollán Toledo on October 14th, 2011, the wife of prisoner of conscience Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, Berta Soler assumed the leadership of the *Ladies in White*.