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PRESS RELEASE # 5

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February 4, 2015. After one month of having her only passport confiscated by the Cuban Ministry of the Interior and with no possibilities to exit from Cuba, artist Tania Bruguera - currently under conditional freedom- must wait for another period up to 60 days, so that the Prosecutor may weigh in on the charges brought by the Cuban government: inciting public disorder, resisting police and inciting to commit a crime; or that he may present new charges.

While a prosecutor in Cuba may take up to 180 days to prepare a case or make a decision, the defense attorney has only 5 days with no possibility of extend it, in order to refute the prosecutor's decision. Besides that, defense attorney has no access to the file during the preparatory phase until the Prosecutor makes a decision (as it has been explained to her by 3 Cuban lawyers).

After visiting several law firms in Cuba, Bruguera has exclaimed: "It is very difficult to find a defense lawyer that would want to take my case since it is a State case against me. Lawyers have told me it is a lost cause; others have told me that they are afraid of the professional consequences if they defend me".

"In Cuba, three branches of state (executive, legislative and judicial) are all one in fact. That makes citizens like me extremely vulnerable and turn them into victims of abuse of the Government's powers", the artist exclaims.

Bruguera wanted to carry out the performance "Tatlin's Whisper#6" in Revolution Square in the city of Havana last December 30th at 3 pm (local time). The work pleaded for the civil right to express freely and peacefully for sixty seconds, respecting political and ideological diversity in Cuban society and making feel citizens as the owners of their own destiny as a nation.

#### Support from the Art community

The well-known website The Voice Project, has written a letter to Raul Castro Ruz, President of the State Council and of the Council of Cuban Ministers, and to Maria Esther Reus González, Minister of Justice, demanding to decriminalize freedom of expression in Cuba and to remove all charges against artist Tania Bruguera.

"Freedom of expression is not a crime and should not be treated as such", proclaims their demand (available at <http://voiceproject.org/takeaction/drop-case-against-tania-bruguera/>) and has been signed, among others by the Marina Abramovic Institute, Pussy Riot, and Directors of Museums and Contemporary Art Centers, curators, and human rights and art groups.

Tania Bruguera was arrested three times after she announced her performance, which provoked that more than 2000 art and culture personalities, friends and citizens of various countries -mostly from outside Cuba- signed a petition to Raul Castro Ruz demanding the artist's immediate freedom, and respect for human rights, and generating a wave of international solidarity. On top of that, dozens of activists from the "civil society" (read non-governmental) also suffered "express detentions".

That letter stated: "we see with profound worry that the work not only did not find an echo on the part of the authorities, but rather caused the arrest of the artist and a diversity of Cuban citizens. With all respect we ask for the freedom of Tania Bruguera and all those arrested. Bruguera is one of the best known Latin American artists, with a work that has been focused on social and political intervention, which is a result, as she has often declared, of her formation under the Cuban Revolution. We are convinced that her arrest and retention of her passport are inadequate reactions to an art work which only sought for a public discussion space", the letter reads.

Her conversations and movements are constantly monitored.

## **Order and rights**

Previous to the performance, Bruguera asked the permissions for Cuban authorities and she obtained a negative answer to her formal application for protection and guarantee of order submitted to the General Office of the National Revolutionary Police (PNR).

Despite the lack of support from the state and Cuban government, several personalities of the artistic and cultural world in Cuba and abroad had confirmed their support in logistics and presence, thus validating its essentially artistic nature.

"The artist has the right to disagree with power, with the status quo, and has the right to be respected for dissenting and to be protected for dissenting" says Bruguera in the Manifesto of the Rights of the Artist, read publicly in the "Expert Meeting on Artistic Freedom and Cultural Rights at United Nations Headquarters, Geneva, on December 6, 2012.

The chosen Plaza is a large-enough public place for different points of views being expressed. "The governments of nations where artists work have an obligation to protect the right of the artist to dissent because that is its social function." Bruguera holds in the Manifesto.

"From the beginning, we have worked with discipline, order, respect for the law, seeking information about public activities regulations, we have requested the permissions and we received support and social acceptance for a peaceful work," says Bruguera. Given the refusal of the authorities, the artist had ratified the work would be done because it was a peaceful action and a contribution of art to necessary debate of ideas in Cuban society.

## **"We demand a humanist and sovereign Republic"**

Before talks held in Havana between Cuba and the United States governments, Tania Bruguera, as spokeswoman #YoTambienExijo ("We Also Demand") platform, publicly demanded the need for a humanist and sovereign Republic: "In a Nation life, there are just a few moments like these that offer the possibility of moving foundations of a society in order to open spaces allowing re-evaluate ideas and practices that define it. Humanistic Republic we deserve requires the participation, consensus and actual decision power of all Cubans. " says the document published on January 20th.

"A Roundtable Dialogue among Cubans would demonstrate a healthy civil society, would truly represent the people affiliated to the dissident organizations, it would allow them to gain real political power and it would remove the criminalization of different opinions. It would show that civil society has reached maturity without needing for others to speak in its name. " she added.

"It seems that the Cuban government is only interested in negotiating money matters without paying attention to human rights and to the transparency of ongoing political and economic processes which could define the lives of many Cubans who are not involved in; we are keeping living in a political system that informs vertically their decisions and the only response to these decisions is to accept them with no questions, " says the artist.

On January 5th, Tania Bruguera handed back the Distinction for National Culture conferred by the Ministry of Culture in 2002 and resigned his membership of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC). He argued: "I cannot receive recognition, or be part of an institution that claims to speak for everyone but the chairmanship is the only who sign. That institution criminalizes, judges and reduces the response to a work generating fear instead of opening a dialogue and a creating a climate for aesthetic analysis."

## **Political Art is uncomfortable**

"Political art is performed when is outdated. The art is political when it is uncomfortable, legally awkward, civically uncomfortable, and humanly uncomfortable. When it affects us, political art is uncomfortable knowledge", says Bruguera in her Manifesto of the Artist Rights.

The Cuban National Council of Fine Arts (CNAP) decided not to support the project Tatlin's Whisper created by the artist. "Under current circumstances, it is unacceptable this purported performance in the symbolic space of the Plaza of the Revolution, especially if considering the extensive media coverage and manipulation from counter-revolutionary media broadcasters ", read the official Cuban organization statement. "The institutions belonging to the Ministry of Culture will be not responsible for the implications this act could provoke", warned the Council.

While official statements speak of "counter-revolution", Tatlin's Whisper mobilizes the imagination of other squares revolutionized since 2011: Tahrir in Cairo, Sol in Madrid, Syntagma in Athens, Liberty Square in New York and its multiple virtual joints through communication networks. While Cuban official statements were denying the artistic status of her performance due to "its political connotations" and demanding merely "pure artistic creation", Tatlin's Whisper answered with a re-appropriation of politics in art.

## **Statement of Principles**

Given the great interest created by the exhibition of artistic work "Tatlin's Whisper # 6" in a public space such as a square, the artist published ten instructions for its completion. Among them, it stands the microphone would be open to anyone who wants to use it, each person would have a minute to speak, all opinions would be tolerated and that the audience could not interrupt any intervention.

Explicitly, the statement said: "Profanities, calls for violence, discrimination, insults to the integrity of persons, illegal acts or violent actions against public order will be not accepted"

## **Cuba-USA relationships**

"Reestablishing diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States will be a positive event for Cuban families, for peaceful coexistence in a globalized world and, most of all, for the individual and collective freedom of each Cuban.", Tania Bruguera interviewed to Huffington Post site in mid-January before the round of negotiations between the two governments took place in Havana.

"In the open letter I sent to President Obama, President Castro and Pope Francis on December 17, I congratulated them on this historic moment, which Cubans have spent half a century waiting for. Hate and embargos accomplish nothing; only through dialogue and acceptance of mutual differences can we all grow and thrive.", she added.

"This letter also led to the creation of #YoTambienExijo ("I Also Demand"), a nonpartisan, volunteer public platform. Through the key phrase of this missive, "Yo Exijo" ("I Demand"), Cubans are asking for the fulfillment of their civil, political, economic and cultural rights. Why? Because it's impossible to talk about the future of Cuba without taking Cubans' rights and opinions into account. It's not healthy for a society to think only of possible economic improvement. It's not healthy for us to think that Cubans' only future is to be consumers.", Bruguera stated.

### **Official information:**

- SITE #YoTambienExijo: <http://www.facebook.com/YoTambienExijo>.
- EVENT on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1515487705372907/>
- TWITTER: @yotambienexijo
- CONTACT [exige@yotambienexijo.org](mailto:exige@yotambienexijo.org)

### **Additional Information:**

#### **MANIFESTO OF THE RIGHTS OF THE ARTIST (read at the UN):**

[http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/files/2012\\_-\\_onu\\_-\\_esp.pdf](http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/files/2012_-_onu_-_esp.pdf)

#### **OPEN LETTER TO THE HEADS OF STATE:**

<http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/7111-1-Blog+2014+overview.htm>