



Cuba's Ladies in White win \$250,000 prize for advancing liberty

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Cuba's Ladies in White, a dissident group whose goal is freedom for all Cuban political prisoners, will receive the Cato Institute's \$250,000 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty Thursday at a dinner in New York.

The *Damas de Blanco* group was founded on March 18, 2003, after 75 Cuban dissidents were rounded up and imprisoned in a government crackdown that became known as the Black Spring. Their wives, mothers and other family members and friends, dressed in white and carrying gladiolas, began weekly marches along Havana's Fifth Avenue in support of the release of the prisoners.

The last of the Group of 75 were freed in 2011 and most were sent into exile in Spain, but the Ladies have continued to March Sunday after Sunday after Mass at St. Rita Church to highlight respect for human rights and to call for the release of all political prisoners.

"For this, the authorities have constantly harassed them and organized mob violence against them," said the Cato Institute in announcing the prize.

"All who labor in the name of freedom take great inspiration from — and feel a tremendous debt to — courageous people who risk everything to stand up to oppression. The Ladies in White are a stirring example," said Peter Goettler, president and chief executive of the Cato Institute.

The Cuban American National Foundation said the Cuban government didn't allow the departure of several members of the group, including Berta Soler and Leticia Ramos, so they could attend the award ceremony. Blanca Reyes and Dolia Leal, who are among the founders of the group, and Lourdes Esquiviel, a member of the executive committee, will pick up the award that is granted every other year for a significant contribution to advancing human freedom.

Sergio Moro, the Brazilian judge who has sent some of Brazil's most powerful politicians and corporate chieftains to jail as part of the massive Operation Car Wash corruption investigation, will be the keynote speaker at the dinner held at Cipriani.

Florida Sens. Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson, along with New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, introduced a resolution congratulating the Ladies in White on receiving the prestigious award, expressing solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people and calling on the Cuban regime to allow members of *Las Damas de Blanco* to travel freely both domestically and internationally.