



Ministries Eager but Skeptical on Cuban Change

Evangelistic and church groups not partying like it's 1989, when communism fell in Eastern Europe.

JASON BAILEY | AUGUST 10, 2006

The announcement that Fidel Castro was temporarily handing over his rule of Cuba surprised Christian ministries working in the region, but they are awaiting evidence of change in the communist country before increasing their presence. The government still restricts missionaries and is antagonistic toward the gospel.

The 80-year-old dictator gave up power to his younger brother, Raul, before undergoing surgery for intestinal bleeding, but Teo Babun, the director of Evangelical Christian Humanitarian Outreach for Cuba (ECHO-Cuba), emphasized that the transition is a temporary one.

"It is important for churches and Christians to recognize that what is happening in Cuba is not what took place in Eastern Europe," said Babun, who emigrated from Cuba in 1961. "It is a temporary cessation of power and not a cessation of the government."

Neither Fidel nor Raul have publicly appeared since the transition, creating increased speculation about the future of the Cuban government. Babun said that ECHO-Cuba, which is based in Miami, has created a hotline to keep churches and ministries updated with accurate information about the situation.

"We are encouraging churches to be informed so that if there is a transition, they can take whatever action they feel is necessary," Babun said.

Ministry needs

The current situation does not change the goals of The Cuba Florida Covenant or other Cuban ministries, many of which are based in Florida. They are concentrating on serving the Cuban church regardless of the political situation.

The Cuba Florida Covenant was established in 1997 as a ministry of the Florida United Methodist Conference, which reaches out to more than 200 churches in Cuba. Spokesperson Renee Kincaid said, "We have experienced many political ...