

Churches find way to witness in Cuba, says WCC leader

by [Solange De Santis](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

As Cuba moves toward a post-Fidel Castro society, its churches are finding ways to "give a Christian witness with integrity" in a country that places restrictions on areas of life such as free expression, said the general secretary of the World Council of Churches after a visit to the Caribbean island.

Relations between religious groups and a government that was officially atheist at its beginning in 1959 have warmed somewhat, said Olav Fyske Tveit on June 1 at the WCC headquarters in Geneva.

Tveit led a WCC delegation on a six-day trip to Cuba ending May 30 and celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Cuban Council of Churches. The group visited an ecumenical seminary and met with Cardinal Jaime Ortega.

Cuban president Raúl Castro, 79, attended the worship service at the Episcopal cathedral and told WCC visitors that "we need your blessings more than ever." Raúl's brother Fidel, 84, ruled Cuba from 1959 until his retirement in 2008.

Catholics constitute about 70 percent of the population of 11.4 million, according to Catholic officials, while Protestants make up about 6 percent. Cuba also has evangelical, Pentecostal and Orthodox churches and many followers of beliefs with African roots, such as Santería.

Tveit noted that church groups in North America are "strong advocates of liberalization of U.S. policy" on family visits, travel and lifting the

U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba.

"I saw very clearly the connection between the church in Cuba and the global ecumenical movement," Tveit said. "What is significant for them is support and the sense of a wide fellowship at times of restricted communication with the outside world." —ENInews