

Blogger Yoani Sánchez remembers Cuba's Black Spring detentions

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Eraldo Peres / AP

Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez receives flowers as she arrives for a meeting with lawmakers at the National Congress in Brasilia, Brazil, on Feb. 20, 2013.

Renowned Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez ended her three-day participation in a technology and information seminar in New York remembering the impact of the Black Spring, a wave of massive detentions that took place in Cuba a decade ago.

“I want to honor and remember those independent journalists, activists and peaceful opponents. They opened a road that we now continue to tread,” Sánchez said on Sunday. “They presented an opposition to which we feel we are heirs despite all the censorship and repression.”

The remarks came on the third and final day of a forum organized by New York University and The New School about technology and the Internet. Sanchez now heads to Washington, D.C., where she will meet with members of Congress on Tuesday. She will visit Miami on April 1, where she will take part in a gathering sponsored by Miami Dade College with students and community leaders.

On Sunday, Sánchez, 37, said that during the Black Spring, the political climate in Cuba was not only highly sensitive but also complex. The dissident movement had little means to share information with the world.

“Those were times when social networks or Internet did not exist [in Cuba], there were no memory flashes, and it was impossible to have a computer,” Sánchez said.

The 2003 summary trials and prison sentences of jailed opponents marked a new chapter in the human rights demands by the international community and the internal dissidence. The incident encouraged mothers and wives of political prisoners to organize a common front known as the Ladies in White. The group demanded the release of the prisoners.

Sánchez said that the campaigns and demands of the civil society have now an additional tool in technology, cellphones and services such as Twitter, among others.

“Many independent journalists and peaceful activists who began their work precariously have now resorted to blogs, for example, as a format to circulate information about

programs and initiatives to collect signatures,” Sánchez said. She mentioned the so-called Citizens’ Demand and the petitions submitted to the international community for the release of Calixto Martínez, a contributor to the nongovernment news agency Hablemos [Let’s Talk] Press, based in Havana.

The Citizens’ Demand calls for Castro to ratify the United Nations political and civil rights agreements signed in 2008. The dissidents formally handed the demand to the National Assembly of Popular Power (ANPP in its Spanish acronym). The document demands a legal and political framework for a full debate of ideas and solutions to the internal crisis.

“It has been my fate to live in Cuba and that is why I have a commitment to the reality in which I live,” Sánchez said. “Yet it is not a defense circumscribed to one geographic location, because it is a condition of citizen responsibility. It is important to have initiatives for transforming the law and demand concrete public spaces within the country.”

In recent months, pressure from the peaceful dissidence to denounce abuse and lack of guarantees has remained firm despite the zero-tolerance policy of Cuban authorities.

In the closing day of the seminar, Sánchez and other panelists, like writer and blogger Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, made reference to the Cuban government’s strategy to impose and maintain a culture of fear over the civil society.

“The Cuban State Security has specialized in creating intrigues and false confrontations,” Sánchez said. “And the worse part is that when we leave Cuba we often carry that fear with us in our suitcase. I have found Cubans here who speak to me in a whisper.”