

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (4th Cycle) regarding Human Rights in Cuba

1. This submission relates to first-hand experience of providing material support to Cuba in 2022, and the impediments to the guarantee of Human Rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights particularly Article 25 which states:
2. “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”
3. Our submission relates directly to the impact of the United States embargo (the Blockade) on the capacity of the Cuban government to fulfil its commitment to adequate medical care for its citizens.
4. Cuba is well known for its outstanding health system and is universally recognised as one of the best in the world. This was demonstrated through Cuba’s response to the COVID pandemic which included sending medical teams to over 50 countries.
5. However, the embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba significantly impedes the capacity of Cuba to fulfil its commitment to its citizens by imposing extraordinary costs and hardship. In particular, the United States blockade continues to impinge on the capacity of the Cuban government to sustain its health system through denying the purchase of vital medications available only from United States-based companies.
6. The extent of the attack on the human rights of the Cuban people can be illustrated by first-hand experience of our organisation (ACFS-Brisbane) in supporting Cuban people, in particular children in need of vital medication for liver transplants.
7. In 2022 members of the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society embarked upon a campaign called ‘From Australia to Cuba with Love’ where over 60 participants engaged in sponsored activities (cycling, walking, running etc.) to raise money for medical supplies to be sent to Cuba, in particular medication for liver transplants for children, which is only available from the United States. We raised over \$25,000.
8. The US embargo prohibited our organisation from transferring funds from our Australian banks through the international banking system to counterparts in Cuba who were waiting to make purchases of these vital medications. We were told verbally by a person working in the Sanctions section of the Australian Banking Association that Australian banks refuse to engage in transactions with Cuba for fear of breaching restrictions imposed by the Office of Foreign Asset Control of the United States Treasury. Despite the assertion of the United States government that medical supplies are exempt from the embargo, the evidence demonstrates that this is not the case.

9. Only after a time-consuming investigation were we able to find a circuitous route to transfer these vital funds as intended. This lengthy and difficult process imposed undue costs and impacted on the timeliness of the supply of these medicines, thus impinging directly on the rights of Cubans as outlined in Article 25.
10. Our organisation confronts these types of challenges on a regular basis. We contend that the enforcement of the blockade by the US government is a significant attack on the human rights of the Cuban people. The blockade is a hostile act, in violation of several principles of the Universal declaration, including Articles 1, 5 as well as Article 25 cited above.
11. This violation has been recognised through the overwhelming support for the lifting of the blockade, as demonstrated over the last three decades in the General Assembly of the United Nations' annual vote on the necessity of lifting the embargo on Cuba.
12. We therefore recommend that the United Nations insist that the US recognises its violation of the human rights of Cuban people and act in accordance with the call by the vast majority of nations in lifting the embargo immediately.