

ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΟΥΒΑΝΙΚΟΣ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ ΦΙΛΙΑΣ & ΑΛΛΗΛΕΓΓΥΗΣ

Μπουμπουλίνας 28, 106 82 Αθήνα τηλ./fax: 210 8214916 e-mail: ellinokouvanikos@gmail.com

ASOCIACION HELENOCUBANA DE AMISTAD Y SOLIDARIDAD

Bubulinas 28, 106 82 Atenas, Grecia, tel./fax: (+30) 210 8214916 e-mail: ellinokouvanikos@gmail.com

Name: Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association

Acronym: AHCAS

Address: Bouboulinas 28, 10682 Athens, Greece

E mail: ellinokouvanikos@gmail.com _ cubagr@otenet.gr

Web: <http://www.ellinokouvanikos.gr>

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Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba, 4th cycle

This submission contains the main points that the Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association would like to emphasize in relation to the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba regarding human rights.

The Greek/Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association has maintained for almost 60 years now a sincere dialog with Cuban officials and common citizens on literally all topics concerning social and political organization of Cuban society.

Since the previous UPR of Cuba, with the exception of the years of Covid pandemic, we had been able, through visits of members of our Board of Directors and other members of our Association, notwithstanding the participation in the European Solidarity Brigades in Cuba, to collect further evidence and first hand information on the related issues.

I. Introduction

1. The victory of the Cuban revolution, the culmination of an almost continuous struggle for national emancipation and social justice, has transformed the island from an exploited semi-protectorate into a sovereign country. The people of Cuba has painfully, under extreme military, political and economic pressure, managed to construct a society free from external or internal exploitation which guaranties the main human rights unfortunately denied to billions of our fellow-men in both poor and rich countries all over the world.
2. Cuba has maintained extensive cooperation with the human rights mechanisms that are applied on universal and non-discriminatory bases. It has ratified 44 international instruments on human rights out of the 61 that

are internationally recognized.

3. The new Constitution of 2019 Republic significantly expanded the catalog of rights and reaffirmed the universal, indivisible and interdependent nature of all human rights. The new Constitution reinforced the protection and promotion of human rights through the reconfiguration of the equality clause and the principle of non-discrimination by incorporating new figures or categories that are vulnerable or susceptible to discrimination such as age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ethnic origin, territorial origin.

II. Political system and elections

1. The Cuban democratic system is based on the direct involvement of the citizens in the exercise and control of the organs of power of the State and the Government at every level. Mass and social organizations that exist in the country are recognized and supported.
2. All important decisions are made after extensive processes of elaboration in which millions of citizens participate in thousands of meetings, giving their opinions, making proposals and achieving changes when necessary. Recent major examples were the of the new Constitution of the Republic (2019) and the Cuban Family Code (2022), involving the majority of the adult population both in preparation of the final drafts and their ratification by 86.85% and 66.85% of the voters, respectively.
3. In Cuba, elections are held periodically for the organs of power, for the different legislative assemblies, as well as general ones, for the National Assembly of People's Power (NAPP). In this March elections, 221 out of the 470 deputies finally elected to the NAPP had been proposed from the municipalities, 135 from the provinces and 114 were of national origin. Vote is free, direct and secret, and also voluntary, and usually almost 90% of the electorate participates in the elections. All citizens have the right to run or be proposed as candidates for all public offices, according to their conditions and merits and not because of their economic situation or financial support from others. Social organizations have the right to propose and elect candidates. Elected citizens are exclusively committed to their constituents; they have to report periodically and are revocable and renewable, contrary to what is happening in the vast majority of developed countries. Cuban deputies represent the interests of the entire Cuban people, of the entire country, not groups of economic influence or of a specific territory.
4. Since the new Constitution in 2019, the broadest transformation of legal processes in recent decades has taken place in Cuba, which incorporates in the administration of justice, the precepts of international treaties and advances in the exercise of law in the world internationally.

III. Human rights

1. Cuba is a unique example among developing countries as it has secured for all Cuban people the access to high-quality basic services, without any discrimination. Health, education, assistance and social security are guaranteed for all, even in the conditions of the pandemic and under the unrelenting economic, trade and financial blockade imposed by the U.S.A. government. The state budget in 2023 allocates 72% to the social sector.
2. Even though, and in sharp contrast to the fact that Latin America is considered the continent with the greatest inequality in the world, Cuba has the highest index of social equality. Cuban Constitution and society actually secure human rights that are almost non-existent in its Latin American environment and that are even in serious danger in developed countries, such as the right to health and public education, assistance and social security, work, housing, access to drinking water, recreation, etc. Children and the elderly have rights that do not exist in most developed countries.
3. Race and colour discriminations have long been abolished. We have never encountered or heard of cases of racial hatred in Cuba, as we regrettably see and read about now days in our own country and in many other countries. Among the candidates for the national elections of March 26, 45.5 % were black and mestizo.
4. The Cuban Constitution consecrates fundamental and advanced social and political rights of women. Article 43 of the Constitution establishes equal rights and responsibilities between women and men in the economic, political, cultural, labor, social, family and any other sphere. The protection of women from gender violence in any of its manifestations is reinforced, the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights is ensured. In Cuba 60% of university students, 70% of the judges, 51.5% of persons holding State and government positions, as well as 53.4% of the newly elected members of the National Assembly are women.
5. The new Family Code, the first of its kind in the world to be submitted to a referendum process, seeks to solve family matters with immediate and specialized legal measures, provides measures for the abolition of prejudices and stereotypes anchored in society. It seeks to unify the protection of the various forms of organization of families on a level of absolute equality.
6. All churches and religious beliefs are respected without any discrimination in Cuba. Article 57 of the new Constitution of 2019 establishes that everyone has the right to profess or not religious beliefs, to change them and to practice the religion of their choice, with due respect for others and in accordance with the law. A Greek Orthodox Church was inaugurated in Havana by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2004.
7. Trade union and other mass organizations are a constituent part of Cuban society and social system. Freedom of opinion and expression on all matters, association and assembly are guaranteed.
8. Instead of special police forces heavily armored, using tear gas, sound bombs and rubber bullets, even against peaceful demonstrations, as it recently happened in our and most other countries, Cuban society and state

have used qualitatively different methods to deal with the violent actions that occurred during the events of July 11, 2021. These unprecedented since 1959 acts of vandalism and looting were mainly dealt with by the people themselves –men, women, youth, social organizations- who took to the streets en masse to defend their conquests. Without a doubt, these events were based on the serious and complex economic environment, on the existence of shortages, blackouts, etc. caused in the first place by the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the different North American governments.

9. It must be noted that although a poor country Cuba has never hesitated to share its own experience and limited resources. Instead, Cuba has held, for more than 60 years a true position of solidarity with other people fighting for independence and social progress. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban volunteers, teachers, doctors and other medical personnel, scientists and technicians have worked, sometimes in perilous conditions to help to establish and organize the inexistent or rudimentary medical and educational services in many African, Asian and Latin American countries; even to cooperate and assist in medical and educational matters some European countries.

IV. Health

1. Health and well being, one of the basic human rights is unfortunately something unattainable for many hundreds of million people, even in rich countries. The Cuban health system, aiming primarily on prevention, is highly organized and freely accessible to everyone, in every part of the country. The achievements of the Cuban health system are well known and dully acknowledged by the competent international agencies and the WHO.
2. Cuban pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical equipment industries, although hindered by the U.S.A. embargo provide an extended technical and knowledge basis for the health system and are exported to many countries, especially in Latin America.
3. Despite the imposed blockade, Cuba has supported and continues to support several countries to cope with health problems due to epidemics, to natural disasters, or to improve their health system. With a previous history of medical collaboration with 165 countries, 23,000 medical personnel currently work in 56 countries. These achievements have been repeatedly praised by the World Health Organization.
4. Misión Milagro (Operation Miracle), a program of international solidarity was launched in 2004 by the governments of Cuba and Venezuela to provide free medical treatment for people with eye problems. It additionally provides the countries it operates in with new medical equipment and infrastructure. By 2019, over 4 million people in 34 countries had received free treatment through the program. While in the initial phase of the program patients were transported to Cuba to be attended there, by 2017 more than 70 ophthalmological centers were build in 15 countries, carrying out vision-

saving and restoring surgery.

5. An important task is also carried out by the Latin American School of Medicine, which has already trained more than 30,000 students from around 30 different nations at no charge, giving first priority to candidates who come from poor communities without access to essential medical care.
6. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba has applied a very effective clinical protocol and, compared to other countries, until mid-March it had one of the best results in terms of mortality, with fewer than 8,550 deaths from the virus. Lethality is 0.77, compared to 1 worldwide and to 1.54 in the American continent. Despite the blockade, it has developed 3 vaccines and 2 vaccine candidates and produced necessary medical equipment. Until January of this year, around 90.3% of the population has been vaccinated. In addition, it was the first country in the world to vaccinate children under 2 years of age. During the pandemic, Cuba sent 4,700 health specialists to 42 countries. The work of the Henry Reeve Medical Brigade is recognized by all countries. Even at this moment there is a mission in Turkey to assist to the medical care of the victims of the earthquake.

V. Education

1. One of the first tasks of the Cuban Revolution was to eradicate illiteracy. On December 22, 1961 Cuba was proclaimed a territory free of illiteracy. Education is completely free for everyone and at all levels. It is the only Latin American country that has met the general objectives of Education for All 2000-2015, established by the UN
2. Against the alarming report published last June by UNESCO, UNICEF and others, according to which learning poverty has increased by a third in low- and middle-income countries and especially in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with a predicted 80% of children at the end-of-primary-school-age now unable to understand a simple written text, up from around 50% pre-pandemic, almost all (99.7%) children in Cuba are in school, and literacy reaches 99.8%. In the current school year, around 1,700,000 students attend all levels and 6,695 new educators will graduate from the 29 pedagogical schools in the country in order to join the educational system.
3. Cuba offers its help and cooperation to several Latin American, African and Asian countries, especially through the "Yo si puedo" method that after being adapted to the different languages, has been applied in several Latin American and Caribbean countries, in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Spain.

VI. Aged and incapacitated persons

1. Cubans over 60 years of age constituted at the end of 2020 21.3% of the population.

2. The new Constitution strengthened the recognition and protection of the rights of the elderly, under the principle of co-responsibility which implies that the State, society and families have the obligation to protect, assist and facilitate the conditions to satisfy the needs and improve the quality of life of the elderly.
3. Article 333 of the new Family Code includes the function of de facto guardian, referring to the possibility that a person without judicial or administrative designation is in charge of ensuring the well-being of the elderly, an aspect that prevents situations of abandonment.
4. The Code produces measures to prevent unwanted entry to reception or specialized centers, since it allows the elderly to integrate into family groups, or to be cared for by a person, together with whom they can form a nucleus.
5. Cuba has made many advances in the protection, education and social integration of people with disabilities. The protection and care of this population group of around 34,400 people fully corresponds to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the new Cuban Constitution has ratified and strengthened the legal protection of their rights.
6. People with disabilities receive free hearing aids and orthopedics, wheelchairs and canes, and other treatments. There are 334 special schools in Cuba where 14,000 educators work for 32,000 students, children and adolescents. Children with mobility problems receive education in their own home. People with disabilities also play sports, learn a job, participate in social life, etc. A considerable number of these young people continue in the University. Those who finish special school are guaranteed a job according to their abilities by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security.

VII. Obstacles and problems due to the U.S.A. blockade

1. The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba officially since 1962, has the explicitly expressed aim to destabilize Cuban economy, to reduce the living and social standards of the population and, through repercussions of the blockade on the daily life of the Cuban people, to produce social unrest and disenchantment concerning the revolutionary and socialist ideals.
2. The blockade violates International Law, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the rules of free trade by its extraterritorial application. It not only violates the human rights of the Cuban people, but also the sovereign right of all countries in the world to relate to Cuba without fear of being punished.
3. In 2017, the Trump administration applied 243 new measures that further intensified the blockade, still applied under the current government of J. Biden, despite the almost unanimous vote against the blockade that occurs every year in the General Assembly of the United Nations.

4. Cuba was the only country that the Biden administration did not exempt from unilateral sanctions in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, for humanitarian reasons. On the contrary, the US government opportunistically intensified this aggressive policy against the country. The blockade and its legal basis, the U.S.A. Torricelli, Helms-Burton and other laws, blatantly violate international law and UN resolutions that prohibit the use of food and medicine as weapons in international conflicts, and acquire the character of genocide.

VIII. Conclusion

Our 58 year long commitment and solidarity with the Cuban people and their striving to maintain their hardly acquired independence and sovereignty against the continuous destructive attempts of the greatest economic and military power of the world, have made clear to us their determination to continue to improve on their social and democratic achievements with revolutionary spirit and genuine participation.