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**Written submission by Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) to the
UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of the
Republic of Cuba, 4th cycle, 2023**

1. **Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA)**, founded in 1945, and holding Special NGO Consultative Status to ECOSOC since 2013, is a consultative and coordinating body of independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations based primarily in North America as well as around the world, serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to economic, social and environmental problems. CVSA's mission is to provide a voice for independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations and the constituencies they serve, bringing local needs into global context and global context to local efforts. All of CVSA's work affirms the tenets of the UN Charter. Further, CVSA is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development around the world by mobilizing involvement of U.S.-based volunteer organizations and their allies for the achievement of the universal, transformative and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in order to end all poverty in all its forms, everywhere.

2. Since 2016, CVSA has been the leading, all-volunteer, U.S.-based NGO conducting education and advocacy in communities across the U.S. for the achievement of 2030 SDGs in the U.S. and in cooperation with the efforts of all nations to achieve the 2030 SDGs.

3. We frame our submission for this UPR for Cuba in the remarks by António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

“When we take a human rights-based approach to development, the outcomes are more sustainable, powerful and effective. This is why human rights permeate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] are underpinned by economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights, as well as the right to development.” And, *“There is no such thing as human rights for all while half the global population is subject to the levels of violence, misogyny, exclusion, entrenched inequalities, economic disempowerment, and multiple forms of discrimination that many women and girls face every day”*

4. In April 2019, in the context of CVSA's campaign for the achievement of the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. and everywhere, a CVSA delegation visited the Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba and attended the first Conference on Science and Conscience for Sustainable Development held there.

Theme: A General Framework of Implementation, 24.61 *Continue efforts to promote the integral and full development of human rights;* and **Theme: A28, Cooperation with other international mechanisms and institutions,** 24.101: *Continue to protect its population against the effects of the embargo imposed by the United States of America:*

5. We saw an industrious, hard working population, a) despite the poverty caused by the unlawful, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States; b) we saw how the poverty imposed is shared by the entire population, such that there is no group of people marginalized through unequal access to the resources the nation is able to provide; and c) we saw how food, health care, housing and education are prioritized and materialized as rights of all people using all the resources they have, as they work to develop more.

6. We saw, through the presence and participation of people from industries and universities from all over Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada and Europe in this conference, how Cuba shares their knowledge and products developed from their domestic programs with other nations and with universities in other nations within international relationships of mutual friendship, pursuing sustainable development for the people of all nations. In particular we witnessed the work being carried out in Santiago de Cuba that is part of the national *Tarea Vida* ('Life Task') plan, through which scientists and social scientists work alongside local communities, specialists and authorities to formulate and carry out programs to identify at-risk populations and regions and confront climate change through both mitigation actions, such as the shift to renewable energy sources, new crops for food, restoration of the coastal areas, and legal enforcement of environmental protections,. They shared this knowledge and experience with us and with representatives from other nations and universities for their own application.

Theme: B41 Right to development 24.92 *Continue to promote economic and social development according to national development plans, to better promote and protect human rights:*

7. Our delegation met owners of small businesses, community leaders, academic professors, farmers, scientists and university students — and saw how all are involved in cooperative work with each other, with support from the government of Cuba at all levels, to solve problems of income, agriculture, industry, transportation and housing and actively advancing sustainable development in Cuba to end the poverty that exists in Cuba.

Theme: E22 Right to food 24.243 *Improve the means of protecting people in situations of vulnerability or at risk of not accessing their right to food:*

8. We visited an agricultural cooperative in the area of II Frente, in the mountains north of the city of Santiago de Cuba, and witnessed the close working cooperation between professors and students of the University with the local farmers and community leaders who together are developing new crops and solutions to problems of food crop development in the context of the hotter climate and drought being experienced by Cuba due to global warming, which Cuba is suffering from but did not cause.

Theme: E41 Right to health and Theme: E42 Access to health-care, items:

24.254 *Redouble its efforts to preserve and improve progress in the areas of health, education and the fight against discrimination and social inequalities;*

24.257 *Improve access to health-care services and social benefits for all persons;*

24.263 Continue to consolidate the quality of the health-care system;
24.261 Maintain and continue to develop the implementation of policies for the access of the population to quality medical services:

9. Coalition of Concerned Medical Professionals (CCMP) is a member organization of CVSA since 1981 with expertise in the health care needs of low-income communities in the U.S., and with 12 years of experience in participating in health care conferences and tours of communities and health care facilities in Cuba.

10. CCMP is an all-volunteer run, non-government funded private membership association of concerned health professionals, community members, students and others, founded in 1979 and nine members of CCMP's Board of Directors and an additional 15 volunteer health professional members have made an aggregate 27 trips to Cuba. One of them, a family medicine doctor, lived in Cuba for 6 years and matriculated through their medical education system, all of whom support this statement:

11. Our observations of Cuba's practices in the realm of human rights and human development come from the four trips we have made to Cuba since the 2018 UPR review, in which we visited diverse sections of Havana, the province and city of Matanzas, Santa Clara and other cities in Villa Clara province.

12. We observed three different medical schools, four hospitals, three polyclinics, a diabetes center, the National Endocrinology Center, day care and recreation programs for Cubans of the third age, a daycare program for small children, an HIV surveillance program in Matanzas, CENESEX, (the Center for Sex Education), an Alzheimer's and dementia treatment program, health education and outreach programs operated by the Cuban Council of Churches, the ecumenical seminary at Matanzas, a vaccine development laboratory, five international scientific conferences on diabetes, social psychology, infectious disease and bio-tech development. Several of us have been in three pharmacies, a family medicine practice, two dental clinics, and a dermatology clinic where treatment was being given to diabetics with severe disease complications, and two election polling stations during national elections. Several of us have had accommodations in four different private Cuban homes (not *casa particular*) in two different provinces.

13. Cuba takes a material and human rights-based approach to development. There is no "development" carried out in Cuba for one sector of their population at the expense of another sector.

14. We have seen the poverty in Cuba, and have seen it intensified after 2017 by the policies, which have been imposed by forces exterior to Cuba. However, we have never seen *marginalization* in Cuba; never have we seen the suffering of one group of Cubans benefit another group of Cubans. We know personally and have witnessed Cubans from all walks of life access basic necessities such as fresh foods, medical care and social security at the same level and with the same ease.

15. Cuba has the lowest rates of infant mortality and maternal deaths — across all populations — of any country in the Western Hemisphere. Some of us have visited the maternity homes in Old Havana and in Perico (Matanzas Province) that guarantee the safe delivery and life expectancy of both mother and child.

16. Cuba has the only completely universal and free health care delivery system in the world: meaning, 100% of their citizens access their care from that system, and only that system. Cubans cannot "opt out" of the system for a private, for-pay alternative.

17. Cuba's education system from infancy to post-graduate and university professional schools is accessed equally by its population across all sectors, due to there being no prohibition on inability to pay. We have met government officials with advanced technical and scientific degrees. We saw the results of the education system when Cuban health officials decided in March of 2020 to pursue their own COVID-19 vaccines. They ultimately developed, manufactured and used two COVID-19 vaccine regimens. Cuba obviated an Omicron wave as a result. Cuba also shared their vaccines and technology with developing nations in the region.

18. Cuban doctors are at work saving lives in dozens of countries around the world. We have met with dozens of Cuban doctors working abroad in exchange agreements with other governments and working on volunteer medical missions with the Henry Reeve Brigade to combat Ebola, COVID, poverty, and natural disasters. Each doctor we met expressed pride to fulfill these duties, happiness and satisfaction with the work, and were ready to repeat the service.

THEME D42: *Freedom of thought, conscience and religion* 24.176

19. We saw extensive cooperation between the Cuban government and the Cuban Council of Churches, as well as the Seminary at Matanzas on matters of health education and social services.

April 2, 2023