

To the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Copenhagen, February 2022

Human rights – Cuba 2023

Regarding the upcoming review of the human rights situation in Cuba:

As president of the Danish-Cuban Association, as a journalist with 30 years of experience, and as a Master of International Development Studies specializing in Latin America and Cuba - I humbly ask you to consider the following points.

These observations are based on frequent personal and organizational visits to Cuba over more than 30 years and specifically on two visits in the period under review 2018-2022. The latest in September-October of 2022 – including September 25th, when the Cuban people had a referendum on a new Family Code. I was able to - together with a Danish studygroup - to visit a polling station and afterwards over a two-week program have repeated dialogues on this new law with individuals and groups of Cubans, and this way get a firsthand and convincing understanding of the law and the democratic process leading to the adoption of the law with the supporting vote of 67%.

This Family Code and the new constitution of 2019 have led to remarkable progress on a large number of issues, some of them among the issues included in the recommendations from the last Universal Periodic Review (3rd cycle).

When in the Annex to a letter of November 2nd. 2018 from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet to Cuba's foreign minister Bruno Rodriguez a recommendation reads:

“Adoption of further measures aimed at eliminating gender and racial discrimination (.....) and implementing a national comprehensive strategy to combat discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes”.

And the following recommendation: “Continuing efforts to combat discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.....”

We can conclude, that a giant step forward has been taken with the new Family Code.

The recommendations from the last UPR also deal with women's rights and role in society. With the new Family Code and also independent from this law we can see how Cuban women play a decisive and growing role as political leaders and in business as private entrepreneurs – this is added to the fact, that Cuba women for years have contributed the same amount of productive and reproductive work as men.

With the update of Cuba's economic model private and cooperative business is growing. A businessman – and member of the Danish-Cuban Association – reports after a business-visit to Cuba (FIHAV November 2022) about women as a driving force in developing MYPEME's (micro, small and mediumsize private business). He counted, that 75 % of participants in business-workshops were women. As a private businessman he states: “Cuban entrepreneurship is an unpolished diamond”. And we can add, that this diamond hang around the neck of a Cuban woman.

We must not forget the children. It is also an issue with recommendations from the last UPR.

It is clear, that with the new Family Code Cuban children now have gained new and important rights. Cuba's children have always enjoyed love and care from parents and adults and society as a

whole - inspired deeply by José Martí's thinking: "Children are the hope of the world". But with the new Family Code children are no longer just "objects for love and care" but have also become "subjects with rights."

The documents from the 3rd. UPR also deals with media and with freedom of expression.

Changes for the better are obvious for any visitor to Cuba, to any tourist who returns to Cuba in 2022 and recall a visit to Cuba 5 or 10 years ago. Internet access now allows the Cubans to get information from a large and diverse number of sources – and this way get input to form their own opinion about national and international questions.

Access to the internet is expanding very rapidly. Most people have the 'hardware' and the government have made access relatively easy geographically, technically and economically.

Access to the Internet is anyway still limited because of lack of online-capacity. The studygroup mentioned before had a brief visit to Playa Giron. Next to our hotel was a construction-activity in full swing. It showed to be the building of a "connection-point" for a fiber-optic-cable from Venezuela to Havana, that – when fully installed – will help Cubans and Cuban business with unlimited /less limited) access to the Internet.

This brings us to a few considerations about the causes of the many limitations and shortages in Cuba. For why does Cuba have connect its Internet-cable in Venezuela – 2000 kilometers South when it could find an even more powerful connection 200 kilometers to the North?!

The answer is: The US blockade against Cuba.

This blockade is so very damaging for Cuba's development, and it hits and hurts the economy, the foodsupply, the healthcare, the education, the sport and culture and the potential full enjoyment of all human rights.

The facts about the effects of this criminal blockade is well known for anybody working in and for the UN and I shall not go deeper into that.

But I must add that the political hostility of the US directed against Cuba for more than 6 decades is not only harmful in terms of economy, production, trade, finance etc. It is very destructive because the US' effort to promote a "regime-change" in Havana politicize and complicate Cuba's effort to fulfil all human rights for everybody.

When millions of US-dollars are spent by government-agencies to pay willing Cubans for political services it is in breach of the UN-charter, that prohibits interference in internal affairs of other nations. But it is also nurturing conflicts inside the Cuba society. It gives artificial life to 'mercenaries' who poses as leaders of trade-unions, as leaders of political parties, as suppressed journalists and this way creates a fake foundation on which Cuba's political system can be demonized.

If I had one 'which' it would be that the USA would come to terms with Cuba and leave that small neighbour alone to decide and work for a better future.

For Cuba harms nobody – on the contrary. Cuba work for fulfilment of human rights in Cuba and abroad.

The Cuban Constitution guarantees the right to work. While workers around the world are fired and at the same time blamed for losing their jobs, the Cuban State blames itself if there is not enough

work for everyone fit to work and seeks to create these jobs while the low number of unemployed receive economic help that guarantees a dignified everyday life.

In terms of economic infrastructure, Cuba is a developing country. However, in terms of health and education, Cuba offers its citizens world class access, and free of charge. Cuba also guarantees housing for everyone, and no Cuban must go to bed hungry.

These basic human rights, guaranteed by the Cuban State not only in the words of the Constitution put in reality, are often not guaranteed even by rich industrialized countries in the world. This reflects the will and determination of the Cuban people to not just pay lip service, but to make these rights, that are part of the UN Charter, real. A right is not a right if you cannot exercise it.

Cuba not only makes sure that its own citizens have these basic rights. Thousands of Africans and Latin Americans have benefitted from Cuban international solidarity in the fields of health and education. Cuban doctors and nurses have made sure that human beings on other continents have the right to basic health care. During the corona-pandemic brought this struggle for the right to health-service to new heights.

Cuban teachers have made sure that tens of thousands in foreign countries have learned to read and write and thereby participate in the development of their society.

And finally yet another reference to the recommendations from the 3rd. UPR that Cuba: “Continue efforts to combat trafficking in persons....ensuring the full implementation of the 2017-2020 national action plan to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and protect victims”. This is well secured in the constitution and other legislation.

The scandalous effort by some foreign governments and politicians to label Cuba’s teachers and healthworkers working abroad as ‘slaveworkers’ and as victims of trafficking is a very unjust, sad and evil example of how the noble issue of human rights are taken hostage and politicized.