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Swedish-Cuban Association – UPR Submission – Cuba – 44th session Oct-Nov 2023

The Swedish-Cuban Association, founded November 24th, 1966, is a registered Swedish non-profit NGO that works to develop friendship between the peoples of Sweden and Cuba. We are more than 1 800 members all around the country and have branches in ten of our larger cities and groups and contact persons in many more. A vital part of our work is to organize public lectures and seminars to help people form a fact-based view and understanding of Cuba. To support this we produce books and other information materials for the Swedish-speaking public about Cuba, for instance its health care and education systems, its work for ecological sustainability, about how the US sanctions against Cuba are a crime against the human rights of the citizens of Cuba. Our website is updated daily and has much information. We organize study visits to Cuba, invite guests to Sweden from Cuba, organize Cuba-inspired cultural events etc. During the years, members of our association have amassed considerable knowledge about Cuba as reflected in the quarterly Swedish magazine Kuba that our Association publishes. The Swedish-Cuban Association has broad cooperation within our country and also many international contacts.

Cuba is at the forefront of developing participatory democracy

(1)

Throughout more than 6 decades, Cuba has stood at the forefront of developing a democratic parliamentary model to truly represent the interests of its population. The method with which the country has developed this is by itself a shining example of participatory democracy, as witnessed by the mass participation of the Cuban population in the development of the new constitution, during which 133,681 meetings took place amongst the general populace, gathering the opinions of 8,9 million participants, which resulted in 783,174 proposed changes to the text. The amended proposal was then put to a general referendum in February of 2019, before being adopted in April of 2019.

(2)

It is plainly evident that great care has been taken to recognize the opinions of the Cuban population, as witnessed by the process concerning the Family Code in the Cuban constitution, where it was acknowledged that further debate was needed. This started another round of public consultation which after 79,192 meetings culminated in the Family Code referendum in September of 2022 and adoption of a new Family Code.

(3)

These examples demonstrate the true character of the Cuban society, where mass organizations such as labor unions, women's organizations, agricultural associations and student unions form a natural and integral part of the political process. Elections to the Municipal Assemblies are strictly without the involvement of any political party, based instead on the merit of the individual candidate proposed by the electorate and the trust they receive from them. Anyone who is a registered voter can be nominated for the election to the Municipal Assembly. The mass organizations hold a special role in the national elections, where they nominate delegates from the municipal level to serve as representatives in the National Assembly. The general goal of the elected political assemblies themselves is to represent the entire Cuban people in all of its plurality, so that Cubans of all ages, genders, occupational groups and ethnicities may feel represented.

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In light of the ongoing global economic crisis, Cuba is currently holding 70,000 mass meetings on work sites throughout the country where workers discuss the economical situation and the Government's current budget proposal. This is yet one more example of Cuba's participatory democracy.

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Some summary points and observations we wish to underline:

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As expressed in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his (her) country . . . ", Cuba's participatory democracy fulfils that right excellently:

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- As explained above, Cuba's Constitution 2019 is the result of mass discussions and proposals from Cuba's citizens across the whole country and approved by a vast majority through a referendum. The election law and other important law proposals are also discussed in thousands of meetings resulting in many adjustments. This is one example of how Cuban citizens "take part in the government" of their country.

(7)

- In small nomination areas of a few hundred citizens everyone can in nomination meetings propose who should be nominated to the Municipal Assembly. These meetings vote for the individual person they wish to be nominated. Political parties are not allowed in the elections. All the nominations within the election district are put on a ballot paper for the municipal election. In Cuba all the citizens have the right to participate in the nomination process. It is not a closed process within parties.

(8)

- Concerning nomination to Cuba's parliament, the National Assembly, the big popular movements and the labor unions and the Municipal Assemblies channel the citizens' proposals of candidates to candidacy commissions that ensure broad representation. When the Municipal Assembly is satisfied with the resulting list of candidates within its municipality for the National Assembly, then it decides to vote yes for it. That is an indirect vote fulfilling every democratic requirement. After that the list, with one person for every seat in the National Assembly, is subjected to the citizens' vote. It is possible to say yes to all the names, or to show dissatisfaction by not voting for one or more of the candidates on the list. The Cuban system may differ from many other countries, but fulfils with excellence criteria accepted in the Western world. Everyone in the electorate has the right to give points of view and propose candidates in the nomination process.

(9)

- Voting is from age 16. At 16 one may be nominated for the Municipal Assembly, at 18 for the National Assembly. Young people have this right to participate in governance.

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- Nomination areas are small and polling places are many and easy to access. This facilitates for everyone to exercise their right to participate in the voting, especially those elderly who may have some handicap.

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Voting is on a Sunday, a free day, making it easy for people to vote.

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If the voters are dissatisfied with an elected delegate, it is possible to dismiss the delegate during the mandate period. This is a further example of the rights of the citizens.

(13)

The elected delegates are required to report at meetings to the citizens about the progress of their work. This is one more example of the rights of the citizens.

(14)

According to UNESCO Institute for statistics the total literacy rate of the world is 87% with great inequalities between the industrialized world and the developing countries. In Cuba the literacy rate is practically 100% despite all the difficulties imposed by the US blockade. Cuba has also a high rate of higher education and contributes with its know-how to other countries. One example is the Cuban methodology that has contributed to give more than 10 million people literacy in many countries of the world. Another is that more than 30 000 foreign students have graduated in medicine as doctors from the Latin American School of Medicine in Cuba (ELAM) for free.

(15)

According to Oxfam hunger affects 825 million people. Poverty and inequality causes one death every 4 seconds in the world. That is 21 000 humans per day. Cuba's welfare system with free healthcare and education for all ensures the basic needs and creates equality and opportunity for all. Such welfare achievements in a third world country would hardly be possible without strong peoples influence in the politics of the country, i.e. democracy in the basic sense of the word; Peoples Power.

(16)

When catastrophes occur Cuba offers to help. Despite scarce resources Cuba makes enormous contributions to other developing countries in need. This concerns the right to life, health and education. Tens of thousands of Cuban doctors and teachers are involved. Today there are Cuban doctors and nurses operating in Turkey and Syria to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of the latest earthquake. Good health, the ability to read and write, and knowledge, are vital for the development of democracy. Cuba's contribution to human rights extends far beyond Cuba's own borders.

For the Swedish-Cuban Association
23rd of March, 2023

Matias Diessler, Association President

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