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**FROM: HOUSE OF LATIN AMERICA (HOLA)**

**TO: OFFICE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS HIGH COMMISSIONER**

**Subject Country: REPUBLIC OF CUBA**

**UPE Session which the country will be considered: February 2009**

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**Dear sirs / madams,**

With greetings, through this statement House of Latin America (HOLA), a non-governmental organization based in Islamic Republic of Iran, wishes to express its position in regard to status of Human Rights in Republic of Cuba. The statement which is issued in line with HOLA's main objective to organize solidarity with the peoples of Latin America shall provide facts for a better understanding of the realities of Cuban society in different fields related to Human Rights and with that it is intended to help the respected Office of the Human Rights High Commissioner to come up with a fair and just position on this issue.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states clearly in its Article 22, that "everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality."

Furthermore, the preamble of International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes that "the standard of a free human being, liberated from fear and poverty can not be achieved unless conditions shall be created that allow everyone to enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights."

Let us examine how these internationally recognized norms of Human Rights are observed in Republic of Cuba.

The very unique position of Cuba with respect to Human Rights could be better pictured if the fact is taken into account that there would be no real enjoyment of human rights without equality and equity amongst people. In Cuba, contrary to realities of today's world, all citizens are treated equally and have the same rights. In that context, each Cuban citizen, with no exception, is the beneficiary and co-proprietor of the heritage, the wealth and the basic means of production of the nation. In addition, all citizens, with no discrimination, have full access to free education at all levels, free medical and health services, social assistance and security.

The truth is that during the 49 years since the triumph of Cuban revolution, the country's record of protecting human rights for its people and its respect of the same rights of other peoples provides an exemplary conduct. This shiny record is no secret to those whose appraisal and judgments are based not on lies and biased propaganda but only on truth and facts. We shall have a closer look at these facts.

### **Education**

- Before the revolution. 30% of the Cuban population was illiterate and 90% of the population was illiterate and semi-illiterate combined. Now, Cuba has 98% literacy rate, average 12<sup>th</sup> grade schooling and the 9<sup>th</sup> grade minimum education level, which together with other educational indices indicates Cuba's place as the first worldwide in educational matters. This impressive record has been achieved by a small nation

with modest resources while being under economic blockade. The extraordinary conduct of Cuba in providing equal opportunity to everyone has been accomplished in a world that over 800 million are illiterate and 115 million children do not have the possibility to even attend primary school.

- Cuba's contribution to education has not been limited only to its people. With the Cuban literacy method "Yes, I Can", designed by Cuban professors and implemented with the participation of thousands of Cuban pedagogical advisers, up to this date more than 2.7 million illiterate people in 22 countries have been taught to read and write; and above 600,000 illiterate people are currently studying, learning to read and write in the languages of their countries, not only in Spanish. Furthermore, Cuban universities have provided government-sponsored scholarships to nearly 30,000 students from 121 countries and these are children from poor families, on many occasions from rural areas in their countries. Of those nearly 30,000 students, some 23,000 are being trained in Cuba as doctors.

### **Healthcare**

- All Cuban families and every citizen benefit from completely free of charge healthcare services with internationally accepted quality standards. This includes ordinary healthcare services as well as the most sophisticated operations such as mind surgeries. Health and health care have been recognized and as major achievements of the revolutionary experience. Cuba's ratio of physicians to population is one of the highest in the world and since the triumph of revolution, life expectancy has been increasing and infant mortality has been drastically decreasing in Cuba. Despite the criminal economic blockade and obstacles imposed on Cuba in the way of obtaining medicines and medical equipment and technology, Cuba concluded 2007 with an infant mortality rate of 5.3 per 1,000 live births, a number leading all of Latin America, the Caribbean and considerably below the US rate of 6.0. Cuba's average life expectancy is above 77 years and is expected to be not lower than 80 years in a period of five or six years.
- The right to healthcare is certainly a human right and Cuba respects this right not only for its citizens but also provides help to secure such right for peoples living in the most deprived countries. It is interesting to note that as of today there are 37,000 Cuban health workers providing services in 79 countries. Of those, over 18,000 are medical doctors. Also, more than 1 million patients with free surgeries through Operation Miracle from 32 countries have regained their eyesight over the last few years as a result of the implementation of Operation Miracle, fostered by Cuba. These patients have been operated on by Cuban doctors, nurses and technicians, either in Cuba or in their respective countries.

### **Political & Civil Liberties**

There has been a constant attempt by some big powers and forces - who do not wish the world public opinion to be informed of the realities of Cuban experience - to insinuate the supposed incompatibility of the political system established by Cuba with the internationally accepted norms in the realm of democracy and human rights. In line with such false image, they picture Cuba as an intolerant and change-resistant society, which does not allow plurality or political participation. We shall examine this fabricated claim against facts and realities.

Article 1 of International Covenants on Human Rights recognizes that "all peoples have the right to self-determination, including the right to determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development".

The Cuban political system is the expression of the will of the Cuban people. It is genuinely authentic and is based on the experiences of its rich history of struggle for equality and of solidarity between peoples, of independence, sovereignty, non-discrimination, unity, people's participation in political power and social justice. The following is proof of that.

- The constitution of republic of Cuba was passed in a popular referendum in 1976 with the backing of more than 95% of the electorate.
- In the Cuban election system suffrage is universal and equal and voting is secret.
- Universal registration in the electoral rolls, as a matter of course and without charge.
- Delegates to the municipal assemblies are directly nominated by the voters themselves at the public assemblies.
- The municipal assemblies propose candidates for delegate to the 14 provincial assemblies and for deputy to the National Assembly, approving or rejecting the suggestions from the nomination commissions which are composed of representatives from union, social, student, peasant, women and other organizations. However, when all is said and done, the people have the last word, through their direct secret vote at the ballot box.
- The elections are completely clean and transparent. The ballot boxes are guarded by children and young pioneers, they are sealed in the presence of the voters, the votes are counted publicly, and anyone interested in doing so may attend including the domestic and foreign press, diplomats, tourists and anyone else who so wishes.
- The vote is free, equal and secret. All Cuban citizens have the right to elect and be elected. Since there are no party lists, one votes directly for the candidate one wishes to elect.
- All of the representative bodies of state power are elected and renewable.
- It is not a requirement that one be a member of the Communist Party of Cuba to be elected to any position.
- All those elected have to render account of what they have done for the electorate who are the ones to hold citizen control over their representatives. In the same manner, all those elected can be recalled by the voters at any time during their term in office. No representative is above the law or their voters.
- There is a high turn-out for elections. There has been an over 95% turn-out in every election held since 1976.
- Voting is not obligatory; it is a civic right and duty, an act of political and citizen conscience which show strength and unity of political action.
- In a secret, free and direct ballot, the National Assembly elects the Council of State and its president from among its deputies. The President of the Council of State is the Head of State and Head of Government. The Cuban Head of State and Government must go through two elections: he or she must first be elected as a deputy by the population of his or her constituency by free direct and secret ballot and obtain more than half the vote, and then by the National Assembly, also by free, secret and direct ballot.
- The power to propose laws belongs to many social actors and not just to the deputies, the Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office. It belongs also to union, student, women's and social organizations and to the citizens themselves. In the latter case, if citizens wish to propose a law, the proposal must be supported by at least 10,000 of those who have the right to vote.
- The most important laws, those that may affect the population as a whole or those that may be of concern to them or to workers and their families are discussed with them and consultations are held all across the country in factories, peasant cooperatives, schools, in the neighborhoods, bodies and institutions before a law is analyzed, debated and passed in parliament.

- There are no political upper echelons in Cuba which designate or nominate candidates. In Cuba this is done through an extremely popular, participative process.

### **Cuban Civil Society**

Cuban civil society takes an active role in the making of decisions regarding all matters of importance to the Cuban nation: its political life, its economic and social development, its defense, its identity and cultural preservation and development, its foreign relations, the distribution of its wealth and the protection of its tangible and intangible heritage, etc.

- Civil society in Cuba comprises more than 2,000 organizations, some of the most prominent of which are the social and grassroots organizations and the technical, scientific, cultural, artistic, sports, religious and fraternal, friendship and solidarity organizations or associations and any others which operate by virtue of the established laws.
- Social and grassroots organizations have hundreds of thousands of members; some even have millions and in view of their importance are even recognized in the Cuban Constitution. Because of their broad-based membership and ability to mobilize, the Cuban political system ensures that these non-governmental organizations are given broad powers and the capacity to propose legislation, to be consulted, to give opinions and even to take decisions as they put into practice the participative democracy instituted by the existing constitutional order.
- Some of the Civil Societies that are most representative of the population in Cuba include: The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) founded in 1960 with more than 8 million members; the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) founded in 1961 representing 331,874 independent peasant farmers or cooperative members who own their own land; the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), an organization founded in 1960, representing 4,652,868 members; the University Students' Federation (FEU) a grassroots organization which represents more than 198,000 students; the Intermediate Level Students' Federation (FEEM) which is the national organization of Cuban adolescent students with more than 646 077 members; the Central Workers' Organization of Cuba (CTC) with approximately 3,000,000 members; the Cuban National Union of Artists and Writers, the National Union of Cuban Jurists and the Union of Cuban Journalists.
- There is also another type of organizations or associations in Cuba which generally have a much smaller membership, whose members group by interests on different fields of social life. They are culinary, medical and technical associations, associations of sugar workers, architects and engineers, of agricultural and forestry technicians, environmentalists, philosophers, historians, social and political scientists, associations for protecting nature, and associations for members or descendants of various different nationalities, etc. Today in Cuba there are 2,204 organizations or associations of this type, of these 1,104 are fraternal, 180 scientific, 135 friendship, 56 cultural, 397 athletic and 332 for social interest.

### **Some other indications of respect for human rights in Cuba**

- Fullest right to unionize is guaranteed in Cuba and all unions in Cuba organize their activities with full independence.
- The right to work is among other basic human rights. Full employment which is one of the principal goals of workers all over the world has come true in Cuba. The unemployment rate of 2006 was 1.9 %, which technically, is equivalent to full employment.

- In 2006, Cuba had a total of 697 print publications.
- Any citizen of Cuba has the right to lay complaints and address petitions to the authorities and to receive adequate attention or responses in a reasonable time, according to law.
- In addition to the rights included in the Universal Declaration, the Cuban Constitution consecrated the following:
  - ✓ That there is no man or woman, fit for work, who does not have the opportunity to be employed and so to contribute to the goals of society and to the satisfaction of his or her own necessities.
  - ✓ That there is no person, incapacitated for work, lacking the means for a decorous life-style.
  - ✓ That there is no ill person without access to medical care.
  - ✓ That there is no child without access to schooling, alimentation and clothing; that there is no young person who does not have the opportunity for an education.
  - ✓ That there is nobody without access to education, culture and sport.

### **Violation of Human Rights of the Cuban People by the US Government**

The above facts testify to undeniable record of Cuba in protection of Human Rights. However, despite all these facts which could be easily verified by any impartial investigation, in several occasions at international tribunals Cuba has been deceitfully accused for violation of human rights. These accusations have been brought about mainly by the powerful government of the United States to justify a combination of its hostile policies against Cuban people, manifested more than anything else in inhuman economic, commercial and financial blockade of that nation. But, that is not all.

The Cuban people have been the victims of mercenary invasions; of biological, radio and television aggressions; of the external encouragement of illegal and violent emigration; of assassination attempts against their main leaders; and of sabotage and terrorist acts that have caused direct damage to economic and social targets in the country for more than 54 billion dollars, the proven death of 3,478 people and the permanent disability of another 2,099 Cubans.

In view of the above, we, the Iranian freedom lovers and defenders of human rights gathered in House of Latin America, demand:

- **Immediate halt in political maneuvers aimed at unjustly accusing Cuba for violation of human rights,**
- **Respect of human rights of Cuban people by the international community represented by the United Nations and the Office of the Human Rights High Commissioner,**
- **Immediate lift of blockade against Cuba,**
- **Immediate halt in practice of Cuba Adjustment Act, which encourages illegal immigration of Cubans, and above all,**
- **Immediate release and freedom of 5 Cuban anti-terrorist fighters who have struggled heroically in defense of right to life of their people – which is the most fundamental human right - and for that matter have been incarcerated for 10 years under the most cruel prison conditions in the US prisons.**

**On behalf of House of Latin America (HOLA)**

**Hamid Shahrabi – Director of Research & Planning**