

Swedish-Cuban Friendship Association, Jönköping Branch, Sweden  
CUBA  
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To the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of UN  
[uprsubmissions@ohchr.org](mailto:uprsubmissions@ohchr.org)

We represent the Swedish-Cuban Friendship Association in the town of Jönköping Sweden. The Association has some 70 members in this small town and a vast experience of Latin America in general, and especially Cuba. Together we have made hundreds of visits to Cuba and have great knowledge about of different aspects of life there. We represent all sectors, ages of society and have different political views on many issues. But we all support the right of the Cubans to decide themselves about their own future, without the constant intervention, threats and aggression from other nations.

We strongly disagree with the slander, lies and anti-Cuban propaganda that nowadays is transmitted by the big media in Sweden about Cuban life. As for Human Rights, we consider Cuba to be a champion of these. The Cuban authorities not only guarantee the rights to life, security, culture, health and education to all its citizens, but this 3<sup>rd</sup> world country also contributes in a remarkable way to alleviate the disastrous conditions of health care in many other poor countries.

We would like to stress a few relevant facts:

- Cuba has made enormous progress in the aspects of equality of opportunity for its citizens, especially equality between man and woman. There is hardly any other country in the Americas where women have such a strong position in all aspects of life as in Cuba. Race discrimination was abolished in 1959. We can also see big efforts to include physically or mentally disabled citizens in society.
- Cuba guarantees its citizens the fundamental right to life, liberty and individual security. Some of our members have asked virtually every Cuban they have met about what is best and what is worst about Cuba. As for the best, the most common answer was “freedom”. The ordinary Cuban feels free in his/her society. He can move around freely, without fear of crime, he feels secure and he feels that it is *his* society. (As for the worst, most of them mentioned the lack of goods).
- Cuba is a country where justice and the rule of law reigns.
- In the streets you can see transvestites and other sexual minorities without being harassed, while in other countries they suffer cruel persecution. We have talked to members of different congregations and all of them have underlined the freedom they have in exercising their religion, no matter what church or religion they belong to.
- Cubans have full freedom of opinion and expression. We, who meet all strata of Cubans, have heard heated arguments, criticism, debates and all kinds of opinions. Nobody is afraid of letting his opinion be heard, whatever it may be.

- Through mass-organisations, such as the women's, the student's, the peasant's, the Trade Union Confederation etc. there are many opportunities for Cubans to influence decisions also in between the elections. All important legislation is discussed by ordinary Cubans before Parliament makes a decision. The politicians do not have special privileges and they can be dismissed by their electorate also in between elections, an example which we by chance experienced this summer (July 2008). Regularly free elections are held with a secret ballot. Nominations are made by the ordinary citizens in the neighbourhoods. It is not money, lies and promises that is important for the candidates. The important thing is to have the trust of your fellow citizens.
- As in no other 3<sup>rd</sup> world country the Cubans have the right to social security and to an adequate standard of living. A big obstacle to achieve this to a higher extent is the cruel US-blockade that has been imposed on the Cuban people for soon 50 years. This is a grave violation of international law and the Human Rights of the Cuban citizens. This blockade has been condemned by the UN General Assembly year after year with an overwhelming majority. But the US does not abide by international law and neither with the expressed opinion of 184 countries (against 3 who support the US position). The blockade not only imposes hardships on the Cubans, but also undermines international law and the UN. In a recent report the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) concluded that Cuba is the only country in the world so far that has succeeded in combining sustainable development with a high HDI (Human Development Index, as defined by the UN).
- The right to education, to health, culture and to exercise sports is widely acknowledged and we do not have to mention any details here. Figures and facts speak for themselves, as do also the good results Cuban students get in international comparisons. As for health Cuba is an example for many countries and has better results than the much wealthier USA. Everybody that has set his or her foot in Cuba has met the lively culture in dance, music, arts etc. The same goes for sports.
- What we see every time we visit is the special care and love that is given to children and youngsters. We see all children well fed, they all attend school and they all seem to live a good and secure life. This is in grave contrast to other countries in the region.
- As for the extremely exaggerated Western media coverage of the "dissidents" in Cuba it must be said that they have no importance at all in Cuba. People know about them, but they are either ignored or despised because they are traitors organised and financed by the USA. This has been proven over and over again. Ordinary citizens have no sympathy for these tiny groups who in a critical situation are meant to be quislings and mercenaries of a foreign power that wants to dominate Cuba.
- When discussing Human Rights in Cuba the role of the USA cannot be omitted if this evaluation is to be just. The world's most powerful nation has passed laws (the Helms-Burton Law) where it has outlined its plans for taking over Cuba. For decades Cuba has been the victim of terrorism, biological warfare, an invasion, sabotage, a blockade that affects not only USA/Cuba, but every country, every company and every person that wants to maintain business or contacts with Cuba. While the USA has put five

young Cubans in prison with life-sentences for having infiltrated terrorist groups in Miami, it at the same time protects confessed terrorists such as Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch who have caused the death of hundreds of innocent civilians. USA budgets millions of dollars every year for the warfare against tiny Cuba; economic, diplomatic and to spread slanderous lies about the country. Cuba has the right to defend its independence and sovereignty and cannot afford letting foreign powers and their agents act unpunished.

- The Cuban Revolution freed, saved and strengthened Cuba. The Cuban people broke the yoke of institutional racism, discrimination of women, nepotism, political corruption, murders and political disappearances, illiteracy, chronic unemployment, ideological domination, hunger and misery. The Cubans we meet are proud of their country, their achievements and are surprised, sad and horrified when we tell them what the media here in Sweden says about Cuba. The same goes for Cubans visiting our town. We have had some 20 professors and students from a Cuban university coming to our town, participating in an inter-change with a university here.
- If one looks at the countries of the world without prejudice, it is quite obvious that Cuba, despite aggression and hardships that no other country has to endure, respects and protects its citizens and their Human Rights in a remarkable way.

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Zoltan Tiroler, President  
Mail: [zoltan.tiroler@telia.com](mailto:zoltan.tiroler@telia.com)  
Tel.: + 46 70 673 09 10