Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba, 3rd Cycle) concerning the Republic of Cuba, 30th UPR Working Group Session (May 2018)

Submitted by the Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association

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Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association
(Ελληνοκουβανικός Σύνδεσμος Φιλίας και Αλληλεγγύης)

Established 1964

In 1964, five years after the victory of the Revolution in Cuba, the Greek-Cuban Friendship Association was founded in Athens, as one of the first Friendship Associations that were established at a global level in order to express the solidarity of our people with the Cuban Revolution. It was supported in this period by many people from the arts, literature and the sciences, however mainly by ordinary people that wish through its ranks to express their solidarity and support for independent and sovereign Cuba.

The goals of the association are to foster and develop friendly relations between the peoples of Cuba and Greece, to promote intellectual and cultural cooperation, and above all to support the Cuban Revolution. These goals continue even today to inspire the members and friends of the association, as well as the majority of the Greek people and the Greek workers, who stand in support with the struggle of Cuba in every way possible.

Apart from Athens, the association has activity with local branches in Kefalonia-Ithaki and Thessaloniki.

The Friendship Association organizes many solidarity events and events to inform the people about the situation in Cuba. It organizes demonstrations against the US blockade; it carries out interventions at the Foreign Ministry of our country; it issues denunciations and resolutions against the acts of the US government and the European Union; it gathers signatures; it invites Cuban specialists on various issues to better inform the Greek people; to this end it contributes articles to newspapers etc. The Association publishes a quarterly journal with the title "Greek-Cuban News".

Introduction

This submission contains the main points that the Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association would like to emphasize in relation to the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba regarding human rights.

The Greek-Cuban Friendship and Solidarity Association has maintained for more than 50 years now a sincere dialog with Cuban officials and common citizens on literally all topics concerning social and political organization of Cuban society.

Since the very beginning, we had been able, through numerous visits and exchanges, to collect further evidence and first hand information on the related issues. A member of Council of our Association is actually in Cuba as the head of a Greek solidarity delegation.

Basic human rights

The victory of the Cuban revolution, the culmination of an almost continuous 90 years struggle for national emancipation and social justice, has transformed the island from an exploited semi-protectorate to a sovereign country. The people of Cuba has painfully, under extreme military, political and economic pressure, managed to construct a society free from external or internal exploitation which guaranties the main human rights unfortunately denied to billions of our fellow-men in both poor and rich countries all over the world.

The Constitution of Cuba provides for and protects the basic social and political rights of the Cuban people. Undeniably, significant progress has been made in Cuba, even more so when one take into account that in other countries of Latin America the people's problems are very intense and unemployment, poverty, employer and state repression are at very high levels.

Race and colour discriminations have been abolished. We have never encountered or heard of cases of racial hatred in Cuba, as we regrettably see and read about now days in our own country and in many other countries.

Religious beliefs are respected in Cuba. A Greek Orthodox church was inaugurated in Havana by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2003.

Children and women enjoy advanced social rights. Cuba was in 2009 the only Latin American country which had achieved to put an end to child undernourishment, a situation that still exists even in countries of Central Europe. Education is guaranteed for all, as Cuba has taken significant steps in the education and protection of children with special needs.

Largely equal opportunities have been achieved among men and women. Among the university students, women count more than 60%. Women participate actively in the political life. More than 40% of the members of the National Assembly are women, ranking Cuba very highly on world level on terms of female participation.

Despite the U.S. blockade, Cuba has met all the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, many prior to when they were agreed upon in 2000.

We note certain aspects more specifically:

A. The right to education.
   The organizations of the UN (UNDP) recognize that despite the fact that Latin America is the continent with the highest level of inequality in the world, Cuba has the highest level of social equality. Cuba is the only country in Latin America that has fulfilled the general goals of Education for All 2000- 2015, which had been set by the UN. Cuba has eradicated illiteracy and school attendance is 99.7%, while in 2009-2013 Cuba invested 12.9% of its GDP in education.

B. On the protection of persons with disabilities.
   Since 1961, Cuba has taken significant steps in education and the protection of children with special needs. Despite the enormous problems caused in education as well by the 55 year blockade imposed by the USA around 2000 school students graduate from 360 special schools. Of these a significant number continues on to university, while for the rest work is guaranteed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. At the same time, a serious effort is being made to integrate them socially which is reflected in the significant number of medals in the Para-Olympic Games: 145 gold medals, 133 silver and 62 bronze, won by 251 athletes in 19 international competitions.

C. Child Mortality.
   Cuba is consistently amongst the countries in the world with lowest levels of infant mortality. In 2016, the level of infant mortality was 4.3 per 1000, whereas in 1960 it was 37.3. The percentage for mortality of children under 5 years old has been reduced to 5.5 in every 1,000 children that are born alive and that of pre-school mortality 2.9 per 1000. The mortality of school age children is 2.2 per 10,000.

D. Right to health-care.
   The health system of Cuba is universally recognized, to which all its citizens have free access. Vaccine coverage remains at 99%, while in 2015 Cuba was the first country to eradicate the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to embryo.
   Despite the significant problems created by the US blockade, Cuba provides medical assistance to many countries all over the world. Indeed on January 31 2017, it was awarded the Public Health Prize by the World Health Organization in recognition of the international assistance it has

provided in natural disasters and serious epidemics. Since 2005, 7,254 such missions have been carried out, assisting 19 countries and treating 3.5 million people.

E. Elections and political system.

Political rights of the working people were nominal in Cuba before 1959; they gained real status only after the revolution and the establishment of the workers' state. Mass organizations and popular participation in the different levels of local and regional government play an important role in the political system of Cuba. All major political and social issues are extensively discussed by the population.

Participation in elections is voluntary. Candidatures are discussed and decided upon on mass meetings. Representatives at all levels are constantly under the people's control and can be revoked if not fulfilling their constituents' aims. The most recent general elections took place on 19 and 25 of April 2015. In the first round over 7,553,000 voters took part, i.e. 88.3% of those eligible to vote. 11,425 representatives were elected to the organs of power at all levels, while in 1,164 electoral districts a 2nd round was held on April 26 as none of the candidates had received 50+1% in the first round.

Obstacles and problems

The Cuban people have been facing the suffocating US blockade for over half a century, which indeed has been intensified over recent decades with the so-called extra-territorial laws of the blockade.

Against the will of the vast majority of the world countries as expressed in successive UN General Assembly resolutions, the USA administration maintains the blockade on Cuba, trying as it did in the past through military interventions, financing of mercenaries, terrorist activities, to impose to the Cuban people a kind of government, economic system and social organization suitable to the USA interests.