

Cuba exemplary record of human rights: submission by British solidarity campaign Rock around the Blockade to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. 6 October 2017.

This document is submitted on behalf of Rock Around the Blockade (RATB), a British campaign in defence of socialist Cuba. We campaign actively against the US blockade of Cuba and against the imperialist occupation and prison at Guantanamo Bay. Since 1995 we have sent thirteen brigades to Cuba, providing material aid to Cuban youth. In Britain we organise protests, educational meetings, and provide information about Cuba through our website. We consistently campaigned for the release of the Cuban Five, and have organised two speaking tours of representatives from Cuba, in 2002 and 2008. We aim to spread the message of the successes of Cuba in fulfilling the needs of human life and dignity, and of providing an alternative to poverty, racism and war, whilst under constant attack from foreign intervention and propaganda.

Human rights in Cuba

The question of human rights is often distorted; the term is politically manipulated in order to vilify nations who operate outside of the paradigm established by the dominant imperialist powers. The concept of 'democracy' has been monopolised by those who really advocate 'economic liberalisation' as a socio-economic and political system: that is, the right to pursue the interests of capital (profit-making) above all else. The nations against whom charges of human rights denial are so regularly levelled, such as Cuba, rather understand that a genuine commitment to human rights and democracy means to pursue guarantees of adequate welfare, education, equality under law and to aim to fulfil the needs of its citizens to live with dignity, regardless of the profitability of such endeavours. Indeed, ever since the Cuban socialist revolution of 1959, Cuba has been forced to resist illegal attempts, led by the US, to destroy its efforts at achieving these aims, whose methods of sabotage are clear violations of the human rights of Cubans and serve as obstacles to Cuban endeavours to carry on its work of meeting humanity's needs, both internally and internationally.

In spite of the extraordinary opposition Cuba is met with at the hands of imperialist powers, Cuba has achieved an outstanding record of providing the basic rights of human life. Hypocritical and politically motivated attacks on Cuba and its people carried out by nations guilty of tremendous abuses against human rights must be addressed to defend against the 'weaponisation' of a term that is deployed to unjustly and dishonestly garner support for regime change. Any such regime change led by foreign capitalist interventionists would undoubtedly lead to drastic reduction in human rights currently secured in Cuba, as well profound loss for hundreds of thousands of people around the world who Cuba supports through its training and exportation of medical professionals and innovations, and its historic support for national liberation struggles in oppressed nations.

One measure of a country's level of freedom is the freedom from want – indeed, this was the basis of the 'Beveridge Report', authored by British economist William Henry Beveridge and published in 1942, which led to the establishment of the implementation of state welfare in post-war Britain. Unlike Britain however, where the need for healthcare, education, housing and social security has given way to ubiquitous privatisation, and where more and more people find themselves in want of liberation from the insecurity that profit-seeking policies give birth to, Cuba remains firmly attached to such principles. The robust and ever-improving healthcare system, the equality in education, the extraordinary rates of home ownership, all despite the US economic, financial and trade blockade that seeks to deny or degrade these human rights, are testament to the nation's trajectory towards freedom, much of which is inaccessible to vast masses of those in wealthy nations. It is without doubt that this path would be made much easier to traverse, those needs and rights much more easily fulfilled, were it not for the sanctions, sabotage, and acts of terrorism that Cuba has had to counter for over sixty years in their struggle to build a society for the people, not profit.

RATB supports the achievements and programs of Cuba that further enshrine human rights. This direction towards human fulfilment is reflected in the constitution of Cuba, which declares: 'Cuba is a socialist State of workers, independent and sovereign, organised with all

and for the good of all, as a united, democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political freedom, social justice, individual and collective welfare, and human solidarity.’ (Article 1); and which guarantees;

- ‘that there will be no man or woman capable of working who lacks an opportunity to obtain an employment with which he [or she] can contribute to the goals of society and fulfil their personal needs;
- Right to work
- That there will be no person incapacitated for work who lacks decent means of subsistence;
- That there will be no ill person lacking medical attention;
- Right to health care;
- That there will be no child lacking a school, food, and clothing;
- That there will be no youth lacking the opportunity for study;
- That there will be no one lacking access to study, culture, and sports.’ (Article 9b)

Furthermore, RATB, as an international solidarity campaign in support of Cuba, defends the internationalist character of Cuba’s constitution, which ‘adopts anti-imperialist and internationalist principles’ (Article 12)

The achievements and programs that would be placed under threat by foreign intervention include, but are not limited to the following;

Healthcare

A guarantee of free and universal healthcare for all Cuban citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, gender, place of residence, religion or class. The life expectancy at birth in Cuba has been raised from around 64 years in 1960 to roughly 79 years today, and Cuba benefits from having among the best patient to physician ratios in the world. The illegal US embargo of Cuba prevents vital drugs and materials from reaching Cuba, making this work much more difficult and expensive, but has failed to halt its development. Both abortion and gender reassignment procedures are available without cost, and are enshrined in law as rights for all.

Education

The guarantee of free and universal education for all, including university education. Cuba trains doctors from all over the world free of charge, including room and board, out of an internationalist dedication to improving the health of not only its own citizens, but those of countries far from its coasts.

The complete eradication of illiteracy, which was at high levels prior to the 1959 revolution, particularly in rural areas. The Cuban Literacy Campaign, launched in 1961, achieved this while overcoming counter-revolutionary terrorism which included murders and torture of students and teachers, with the support of covert CIA programs such as Operation Mongoose. This terrorism was aimed at weakening support for the educational revolution and at engineering defeat for the government.

Equality

Laws were enacted by the revolutionary government making racial discrimination in workplaces, education, housing and medical care a punishable offence. Article 42 of the Cuban constitution states that 'Discrimination based on race, colour of the skin, sex, national origin, religious creeds, or any other type offending human dignity, is prohibited and punished by the law. The State's institutions educate all, from the earliest age, in the principle of the equality of human beings.'

Upon entering Havana in 1959, the rebel army crushed the fences on Havana's beaches that demarcated areas where black Cubans could not go, setting the tone for the coming abolition of racial segregation in the country.

The abolition of private schools, and establishment of a well-funded and integrated public school system in Cuba meant an end to the separation of white and black Cubans in education, and an overall reduction of the high levels of inequality and racial prejudice that was present in the US-supported Cuban education system under the dictator Batista.

Internationalism

Mission Milagro (Mission Miracle), a cooperative program launched with Venezuela to provide free of charge sight-saving surgery and ophthalmological care to over 3.5 million people, mainly in Latin America, where such procedures were out of reach to the vast majority.

The commitment to meeting healthcare needs of nations with limited access to advanced medical programmes has notably included sending doctors to West Africa in 2014 to lend vital assistance to containing and reversing the outbreak of Ebola in the region. It has similarly sent doctors to countries suffering from the devastation of natural disasters, such as the Asian tsunami of 2004, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Cuba has provided healthcare to victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, and is currently engaged in operations in Mexico in the wake of recent earthquakes. Cuba offered to send 1,500 doctors to Louisiana in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina, but then-president George W. Bush refused this urgently needed assistance, restricting disaster victims' ability to receive care in the wake of the tropical storm that killed over 1,800 people.

Article 13 of the Cuban constitution declares that 'The Republic of Cuba grants asylum to those persecuted for their ideals or struggles for democratic rights against imperialism, fascism, colonialism and neocolonialism; against discrimination and racism; for national liberation; for the rights and demands of the workers, peasants, and students; for their progressive political, scientific, artistic, and literary activities; and for socialism and peace'

Cuba has lent support to national liberation and decolonisation struggles in oppressed nations, such as sending a medical brigade to Algiers in 1963 following the Algerian War of Independence, deploying troops to Angola in 1975 to defend the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola against the intervention of Apartheid South Africa.

Democratic participation

Perhaps the most frequent attack made against Cuba's socialist system is a supposed lack of political freedom. The reality is that the average Cuban is much more involved in the country's politics than can be said of those living in capitalist countries. Elections are held every two

years on a local level, and every four years on a national level. This is often ignored, as it does not fit the narrative of totalitarian rule put forth by representatives of financially dominated governments in the West. When not ignored or lied about, they are dismissed for not matching the parliamentary systems of those nations decrying a lack of democracy in Cuba. Cuba, seeking a path of self-determination, chooses not to allow foreign nations to design their electoral system for them, or allow the same corporate influence seen in these nations to creep into how they govern. Instead of aiming to emulate congresses made up of career politicians under the direction of wealthy lobby groups, Cuba's National Assembly of People Power consists of over 600 representatives – half of which are elected by secret ballot to represent their neighbourhoods, and half of which represent various sectors, including trade unions, students, women's groups and farmers' organisations. Outside of the parliamentary system, there is also a high level of participatory democracy practiced through the numerous mass organisations that are prevalent in Cuba and absent in much of the rest of the world. There is regular public consultation with the public on planned reforms and legislation, rather than decisions made behind closed doors. It is not democracy that is missing in Cuba, and such allegations that Cuba is undemocratic merely reflects that this democracy is built by and for the Cuban people, and is not vulnerable to be used as a tool by powerful and wealthy nations to determine an economic policy that furthers multinational business interests.

Double standards

At the time that the earliest of Cuba's these changes were being made, Cuba's chief accuser of human rights violations, the United States, was still brutally enforcing Jim Crow segregation laws. The US continues to discriminate against black people, as reflected in the overrepresentation of black people in the prison system, the impunity with which police officers kill black men, and the broad gaps in life expectancy, education and income between black and white US residents. The current rise in white supremacist rallies and violence reveals that the United States is in no position to lecture on freedom in Cuba, and should instead concern itself with resolving its own deep-seated tensions and lack of protection for minority groups.

Whilst the imperialist United States, Britain and others accuse Cuba of enacting political repression, it is in Guantanamo Bay that one truly finds the most egregious violations of freedom. The base, which is the oldest overseas Naval Base run by the US, contains a detention prison where inmates are detained without trial and indefinitely. Prisoners at the camp are subject to torture and abuse, which has led to the death of at least nine inmates. If the US is sincere in its determination to ensuring human rights are respected in Cuba, they need look no further than their own usurped territory on the island.

The US hostility towards Cuba, whilst targeted at harming the Cuban economy and cause suffering for its men, women and children, also costs its own people dearly. Whilst there is no commitment to properly funding healthcare or education in the United States, the refusal to end the embargo costs the US billions of dollars a year in lost trade. That's without mentioning the millions in congress-approved funding for regime change programmes, ongoing for decades, including the financing of terrorism which has to date killed over 3,400 Cubans and maimed thousands more. Throughout, the US has hypocritically accused Cuba of being a state-sponsor of terrorism for its support for national liberation struggles. RATB asserts plainly that the US must cease its funding of violence, destabilisation and imposed hardship, and instead turn its focus towards ensuring the human rights of its own citizens are granted and secured, and end its material opposition to the achievement of human rights measures enacted in sovereign countries, not only in Cuba, but in all nations towards which it directs its forces.