



REPUBLIC OF CUBA
Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
and other International Organizations in Switzerland

STATEMENT BY H.E. Mr. BRUNO RODRÍGUEZ PARRILLA, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, DURING THE PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL REPORT TO THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW PERFORMED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, MAY 1st, 2013.

Mr. President:

Cuba is honored to present its second National Report to the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism (UPR) performed by the Human Rights Council. It does so feeling proud of its humane work and its performance to ensure the enjoyment of all human rights by all its citizens.

The economic, political and media blockade imposed by the United States which Cuba has resisted undefeated for more than fifty years, is a mass, flagrant and systematic violation of human rights which causes damages, scarcities and hardships, but has not managed to hinder the provision of equal opportunities, the equitable distribution of wealth or the realization of social justice.

The relentless attempts by the United States to impose a “change of regime” on the Cuban people is a serious violation of its right to self-determination, which has failed to prevent the active, democratic and direct participation of its citizens in the construction of its constitutional order, the decisions adopted by its government or the election of its authorities.

Appearing before this Council is a country without persons who are helpless or deprived from their dignity; where there are no children lacking quality education; where there are no ill persons lacking a dedicated medical assistance or senior citizens devoid of social protection. Ours is a nation where there are no workers, peasants, intellectuals or students whose rights are not protected by law; a place where public safety is guaranteed; where there is no organized crime or drugs. Appearing before this Council is a united people, with a profound social cohesion; a State where there has not been a single extrajudicial execution; where there are no tortured or disappeared persons; where there are no kidnaps or secret prisons.

This exercise is being held on the International Workers' Day, which is being joyfully celebrated in Cuba by millions of compatriots and hundreds of friends from all over the world in all streets and squares. They do so as free men and women, in the defense of the rights they have achieved. They are not masses of people who are rightfully outraged, or workers who have lost their jobs, or students besieged by high costs or debts, or immigrants persecuted for reasons of selfishness, racism or xenophobia. May our solidarity go to all those who are struggling, anywhere in this planet, for human rights for all, for peace and development, for the survival of the human species, which is being threatened by colossal arsenals and climate change.

Mr. President:

This report is the result of a broad and participatory process of consultations which involved several governmental institutions, the Parliament, several civil society organizations and other relevant institutions.

The follow-up to the recommendations accepted during the first cycle of the Universal Periodic Review was the main objective of the works carried out by the National Group which coordinated the process and drafted the report.

Significant economic and social changes have taken place since Cuba's first presentation before this mechanism back in 2009. We have moved forward in the process of institutional development; we have continued to improve citizens' participation and control as the fundamental basis of our democracy and upheld our efforts to achieve a sustainable development with social justice.

Cuba remains committed to its irrevocable determination to move forward with its socialist, autochthonous, original, democratic and openly participatory development.

We have not come here to present a completed work; nor do we intend Cuban socialism to be considered a model to anyone. Neither do we accept the existence of a unique or universal democracy model, much less the imposition of the political system of the western industrialized countries, which is currently going through a crisis. We likewise reject political manipulation, hypocrisy and double standards which are often present in human rights debates.

Mr. President:

One of the most transcendental developments occurred since the last session was the adoption by the National People's Power Assembly of the Guidelines for the Economic and Social Policy of Cuba, which are a set of essential decisions aimed at the updating of the Cuban economic and social model as well as a government program.

The Guidelines were adopted after a very broad popular debate in which millions of Cuban men and women had absolute freedom to propose more than 400 000 amendments which modified two thirds of the draft and put to the vote each and every one of its twelve chapters. This was a peculiar experience of direct consultations with all citizens to reach a consensus on the economic, monetary and social policies of the government, as well as the actions that need to be taken to overcome the effects of the global economic crisis and the problems facing the Cuban economy without resorting to neoliberal or austerity formulas and without bailing out banks at the expense of unjust cuts in social expenditures.

Cuba has continued to strengthen the democratic character of its institutional system with laws, policies and programs that have a popular and participatory character, in accordance with the aspirations of the people.

New standards have been adopted that expand human rights' legal framework such as the ones related to social security, housing, employment, self employment, the distribution of land in usufruct, among others. Likewise, progress has been made in the improvement and updating of the juridical system of the country through the implementation of a series of modifications that are more in tune with the needs of the Cuban society and the highest international standards in this area.

The most outstanding of them have been the amendments introduced to the Migration Law, which have had a major impact on and improved the relations between the Cuban nation and its émigrés, despite the continued manipulation of the migration issue.

Mr. President:

The system for the legal protection of human rights in Cuba is not confined to a description in the Constitution. Human rights are duly developed and guaranteed in other substantive and procedural provisions in force, in accordance with the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and all other international human rights instruments.

Cuba has attained significant achievements in the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. Education is universal and free at all levels.

Through the implementation of a series programs, the Cuban State ensures that every boy, girl and adolescent has the possibility and the right to study in the National Education System and continue their training, on the basis of equal opportunities, for as long as their capabilities and efforts allow. The First Vice President of the Council of State and of Ministers was invested with powers to protect and oversee the exercise of children's rights.

The right to education is guaranteed to every child and youth who may suffer from some sort of mental or physical disability through the Special Education system in those cases where it is impossible to fully incorporate differently abled persons to general education institutions. The attention to these children and youths is guaranteed in every corner of the national territory through different modalities and at all educational levels.

According to the most recent UNESCO's World Report on the Follow Up to Education for All (2012) Cuba ranked sixteenth in the world for its educational development index. UNESCO recognized Cuba as the Latin American and Caribbean country that invests the highest share of its national budget in education.

Pursuant to the maxim expounded by Martí, "To be educated is to be free", Cuba stands out for its cultural development, full access by its people to art and literature, the preservation and defense of our culture and the enhancement of our spiritual values.

Cuba has been likewise recognized for its outstanding results and the high quality of its public health system, which is universal and free. With an infant mortality rate of 4.6 per every 1000 live births, Cuba has managed to consolidate several indicators which reveal a much better performance than those of several rich and industrialized countries. With one medical doctor per every 137 inhabitants Cuba is, according to the World Health Organization, the most gifted nation in this sector.

From 2009 to 2011 the social security system provided coverage for 19 371 mothers of children with severe disabilities, which has enabled them to personally take care of their children.

The attention to elderly persons is a priority. It is for that reason that a multi-disciplinary and intersectorial work is done to ensure the quality of life of this growing population sector. Life expectancy at birth is 78 years as an average. During the next ten year period more than 87 per cent of Cubans will surpass the age of 60.

The rights to life, liberty and security of persons are based on the principle of respect for human dignity and are the fundamental pillars in all the actions undertaken by the Cuban authorities and the functioning of the entire society.

Five Cuban anti-terrorists who are suffering an unjust and prolonged incarceration in the United States are devoid of every protection. They were tried without the guarantees of the due process, in an ambiance of revenge and hatred, in the midst of a slanderous campaign that was funded by the Prosecution; they were submitted to long periods of solitary confinement. Their legal defense was hindered and they were subject to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatments and several of them have not been allowed to be visited by their relatives.

We are deeply concerned about the legal limbo that supports the permanent and atrocious violation of human rights at the illegal Naval Base in Guantánamo, a Cuban territory that was usurped by the United States, a center of torture and deaths of persons who are under custody. One hundred and sixty six persons have remained under detention for ten years now, without any guarantees, without being tried by a court or the right to legal defense. One hundred of them have gone on a hunger strike and 17, whose lives are at risk, are being submitted to forced feeding through intubation. That prison and military base should be shut down and that territory should be returned to Cuba.

Cuba recognizes, respects and guarantees religious liberty without any discrimination whatsoever. There are around four hundred religions and religious institutions represented in the country.

All citizens' rights to freedoms of opinion, expression, information and press are recognized. The high educational and cultural level of the people; the social and public character of the media; the nonexistence of financial and media emporiums that impose economic and political interests elsewhere in the world; the absence of commercial publicity, which more often than not is mind-numbing; and the exercise of people's power provide the material conditions for their enjoyment.

The right to free and truthful information should be guaranteed by all States. There is urgency for the democratization of the Internet and the transfer of resources and suitable technologies for social communication. The monopoly over technology and the generation of contents, the political or military use of networks and the cultural and linguistic discrimination should come to an end. It is necessary to eliminate the digital divide.

The blockade prevents Cuba from connecting itself to nearby submarine cables, which increases the costs of these services and hinders people's access to them and forbids international suppliers from providing us with services, software or technologies. For example, our country is denied access to several Google services or to international technological platforms.

Between 2010 and 2013 the United States has also allocated 191.7 million dollars to the funding of organizations and hirelings, the use of information technologies for subversive purposes and illegal radio and television broadcasts intended to bring about a change of regime in Cuba. Added to this there are other funds that are worth millions which are paid by their special services and private groups. Some of its allies take part in that effort.

Mr. President:

In Cuba equality and non-discrimination are fully guaranteed. The achievements attained in the area of gender are outstanding. The Cuban government continues to implement a series of laws, policies and programs aimed at upholding of those principles.

The number of Cuban women in the National People's Power Assembly -the Cuban Parliament-, increased to 48.86 per cent. In proportion, Cuba ranks second in the world in terms of the number of women parliamentarians. For the first time, two women have been elected Vice Presidents of the Council of State. Besides, they account for 41.9 of its members. One third of the ministries are led by women.

Institutional racism was eradicated. The least favored sectors were offered real benefits and full possibilities for the upgrading of their educational level. We are still struggling to fully and effectively ensure equal opportunities to those who belong to the traditional least favored sectors or to dysfunctional families. Yet to be eradicated are certain racial biases and stereotypes which were inherited from a colonial past of slavery and a neocolonial regime which established racism and racial segregation.

As a complement to the efforts made by the government and the all-out protection provided by our laws, the decision was made to appoint one Vice President of the Council of State to follow up and monitor the struggle against racism and racial discrimination.

We feel proud of our African heritage. We selflessly shared the same fate of our African brothers and sisters in their struggle against colonialism and *apartheid*.

The struggle against discrimination based on sexual orientation is another area where we have recorded a sustained progress. The National Sexual Education Program has implemented a permanent educational strategy to promote respect for free sexual orientation and gender identity through the creation of several areas of exchange based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

With regard to the promotion and guarantee of the exercise of the rights of disabled persons, we have made it possible for most of them to be able to study and work. They are offered support in different areas of social life.

Mr. President:

Cuba's Penitentiary System is based on the principle of human enhancement. Cuba abides by all the precepts contained in the International Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and prioritizes the preventive approach through a number of social programs, among them the ones aimed at turning prisons into schools.

Medical and dentistry care is guaranteed to all inmates at no cost, on a par with the assistance provided to the rest of the Cuban population. They receive equal pay for the work they do.

In Cuba, 27 095 inmates, approximately half of the total, are studying at different levels of learning, including higher education, in every prison of the country. Many of them are also being trained in some trade. This education system has contributed to the reincorporation of inmates to society, including work.

Mr. President:

Our people, despite all the scarcities and difficulties, have selflessly shared and continue to share what it has with other nations, thus making a fraternal contribution to the exercise of the human rights of other peoples of the world.

Since 2004, tens of thousands of citizens have recovered their sight thanks to the "Miracle" Operation. Eye surgeries have been performed, free of charge, on 2.4 million persons from 34 Latin American, Caribbean and African countries.

Since 2005 the International Contingent of Medical Doctors Specialized in Disaster Relief and Serious Epidemics "Henry Reeve" has offered medical assistance to more than 3 million victims.

Cuba's cooperation with Haiti, a sister Caribbean nation that needs resources for reconstruction and development, has continued. More than 12 000 Cuban cooperation workers have worked in that country.

Since 2004 cooperation in the literacy and post-literacy projects have expanded through the implementation of the Cuban programs "Yes, I can" (UNESCO's King Sejong Award); "I Can read and Write" and "Yes, I Can Go On". Until November of 2012 a total of 6.9 million persons had graduated from the program "Yes, I Can"; and 976 000 persons had graduated from the program "Yes, I Can Go On".

Mr. President:

Cuba maintains a high level of cooperation and interaction with the procedures and mechanisms of the United Nations system in the area of human rights which are implemented universally and on a non-discriminatory basis.

We have always expressed our unequivocal willingness to establish a dialogue on every issue and with all States on the basis of mutual respect, sovereign equality, and the recognition of the right to self-determination.

Cuba has consolidated a positive dialogue with the bodies created by virtue of international treaties on human rights.

Since 2009, five National Reports have been issued; three of them have already been presented before the relevant Committees. The Initial Report based on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Initial Report based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are currently undergoing a review process in Cuba prior to their submission.

Cuba is a State Party to 42 international human rights treaties and complies with all their provisions. Other human rights instruments, including both international Covenants, are still being considered by the competent authorities.

Our country has cooperation relations with several humanitarian and human rights organizations from all over the world, both in its own territory and as part of international cooperation missions.

Mr. President:

We are open to a constructive and respectful dialogue, based on the truth. We will offer all necessary information and clarifications.

Thank you very much.