



Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association Toronto

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Email: info@ccfatoronto.ca Website: www.ccfatoronto.ca Established 1977
Member of Canadian Network on Cuba

SUBMISSION TO UPR SESSIONS- CONTRIBUTION FOR CUBA BY:

CANADIAN-CUBAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION TORONTO (NGO)
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October 3, 2012

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE CANADIAN CUBAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION TORONTO:

The Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association Toronto (CCFA Toronto) was founded in 1977 and continues to work on its purpose to build friendship, respect and co-operation between Canadian and Cuban peoples.

The CCFA Toronto has a membership of over 300 individuals and meets annually to decide on a plan of work and elect an executive committee of 12 people. Currently the President is Elizabeth Hill, Vice-president Ardis Harriman, Treasurer Sharon Skup, Recording Secretary Brien Young and Membership Secretary Doug Oyler.

2. PUBLICATIONS:

The CCFA edits a bi-monthly newsletter (Amistad) that is mailed to members and is posted on its website www.ccfatoronto.ca.

The articles are produced by material from Cuban sources, internet sites from Cuba, and contributions by members who have travelled to Cuba. They deal with the on-going activities of the CCFA Toronto, as well as reports on cultural, scientific and educational events in Cuba and information and reports on conferences and festivals that take place there.

3. ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION:

The CCFA has an annual general meeting as well as several meetings throughout the year in which it shows films, has discussions, and meetings as well as hosting visitors from Cuba. For example, last year, we hosted a meeting with Dr. Augustín Lage, Director of the Cuban Institute of Immunological Research and facilitated his visit and meeting with representatives of the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

Representatives from the CCFA Toronto have attended Human Rights Consultations between Foreign Affairs Canada and Canadian non-governmental human rights organizations in Ottawa and made submissions on behalf of the organization. We also attend conferences in Cuba such as the International Conference on the Cuban Five which has taken place annually in Holguín, Cuba.

4. OUR WORK WITH CUBA:

We maintain open and cordial relations with the Consulate of the Republic of Cuba in Toronto and the Embassy of Cuba in Ottawa. We have regular meetings with their staff and they are invited to all activities in celebration of Cuban holidays, or to host visiting Cuban dignitaries.

We also maintain an on-going relationship and dialogue with the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP). We meet with them on our regular visits to Cuba and when they travel to Canada. They also send us reports on events in Cuba and have kept us informed about changes taking place there. In September 2012, the Head of the North American desk at ICAP visited Toronto and we had a frank and open discussion with her about the current political and economic changes taking place in Cuba. She also participated in the Peoples Tribunal and

Assembly to Free the Cuban Five which was organized by various groups in Toronto and was held at Toronto's City Hall, supported by some members of the Toronto City Council.

5. OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION IN CUBA:

When Cuba attained their true independence in 1959 the people were able to enjoy human rights for all. Racial discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination, the literacy campaign, free public education, including university, public healthcare system, rights to union membership, subsidized food, and employment opportunities helped people to develop and enjoy an independent lifestyle. Democratic elections at the municipal, provincial and national level also give Cubans the opportunity to elect their leaders.

Cuba's humanitarian aid to other countries is outstanding, particularly is work in Haiti before, during and after the devastating earthquake in 2010.

CCFA Toronto has observed that the US blockade against Cuba and its policies of interference with normal trade from other countries with Cuba, have been a major obstacle for the Cuban people to fully develop their economy and enjoy normal trade and travel with other countries. The result of the blockade of over 50 years has impinged on the human rights of Cubans.

We also note that the human rights of Canadians are affected by the blockade, and there are several examples of this:

- a) Canadian issued credit cards are not valid in Cuba, if the parent company is of U.S. origin.
- b) US owned travel companies based in Canada are not allowed to sell travel packages to Canadians going to Cuba.
- c) Airline passenger lists are being vetted by US authorities.

We are pleased that Canada has maintained its opposition to the US blockade against Cuba, and we encourage the government to continue to be part of the growing number of countries that condemn the immoral blockade against the Cuban people. However, we believe that the Canadian government needs to do more to uphold Canada's position that companies operating in Canada must abide by Canadian laws, and not those of the United States.

6. CONCLUSIONS:

Aggressions by the United States against Cuba over the years have violated its sovereignty and human rights. Acts of terrorism emanating from the US have gone unpunished by the US. The human right to life, free from fear has been violated over and over by threats, attacks, violations of air space, the bombing of a Cubana airliner in 1973 and hotel bombings, including one which killed a tourist from Montreal.

Media campaigns against Cuba have been particularly malicious, by ignoring Cuba's accomplishments for its people and distorting the truth about life in Cuba.

We are particularly concerned about the five Cubans serving long, unjust sentences in the United States, simply for attempting to stop this terrorism. The CCFA Toronto has actively worked to make known the case of the Cuban Five because the media in the USA and in Canada have been virtually silent about it.

We believe that the Canadian government must take a position of respect toward Cuba, defend its right to build a society without outside interference and distortions, and recognize its outstanding achievements.

Elizabeth Hill, President
Canadian Cuban Friendship Association Toronto

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