



Guyana Agricultural And General Workers Union

REGISTRATION No.118

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OUR REF:.....
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MOTTO: Discipline, Solidarity, Democracy

The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide this submission regarding Human Rights conditions in Cuba as it undertakes its United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Our Union was established in 1961 and is the largest Trade Union in Guyana representing almost 20,000 workers including the overwhelming majority of sugar workers who are employed in the country's largest industry. GAWU also represents workers in Fish Processing, Forestry, Rice Processing, Distilleries, Services, Offices and some other places.

The triumph of the Revolution gave the Cuban people the full and universal enjoyment of all human rights while giving that country true independence. The 1959 triumph made possible the enjoyment of civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights for each citizen in the country. All citizens are considered equal, regardless of race, skin colour, sex, convictions or national origin. This has continued over the years and objective visitors have no difficulties to discern the realities.

In Cuba the difference of criteria is respected and stimulated on the grounds that in the difference of ideas a better solution to internal problems can be found. Recently, the wide debate around several social and economic topics in which the people were consulted on the new policies that will lead to better social and economic changes is highly commended. We are particularly enthused by the involvement of the people in determining the direction of their country's future.

The update of the Cuban economic model that is currently carried out in the island is for the benefit of the entire population. This process has, we note, its objective in improving the standard-of-living of the population and to create a fairer redistribution of the national income.

This economic model today being pursued does not significantly vary from the base of the economic system rooted in the socialist property where the people predominate over the basic means of production.

To Cuba, the enjoyment of the people to the right to food and food security is a matter of national security, thus the new emphasis on the agricultural and the livestock sector. New regulations with regard to giving lands to farmers in order to guarantee a greater food security for the Cuban population have been and are being implemented. This is achieved with the political will of the Cuban government and its firm position to make progress in food rights. This measure opens further possibilities to overcome the effects to the Economic Blockade imposed by the United States for more than half a century, which directly affects the Cuban people.

All Cubans have access, without discrimination, to basic services such as education, health, and social and security assistance.

The State has created the material conditions and the human capital to guarantee a quality education for all. It is free of charge at all levels. Cubans can have access to education no matter the gender, color of the skin, family income, religion, opinions or political ideas. The follow-up report of the UNESCO Education for All Programme (2011) places Cuba in position 14 worldwide.

Cuban international cooperation in the area of education has come to several Latin American and Caribbean countries using the Cuban method "*Yo si puedo*" (Yes I Can) (UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize), "*Ya puedo leer y escribir*" (Now I can read and write) and the "*Yo si puedo seguir*" (Yes, I can go on). Notably, as at May, 2012 the total number of students graduated from the "Yes I can" programme was of 6,775,332 and from the "yes, I can go on" program was of 853,088.

Guyana has benefitted in a big way from the scholarship programme of the Cuban Government from the earliest years of the Revolution. That programme, over the years, has expanded after 2006. Hundreds of Guyanese studied and are studying in Cuba in recent years up to the present time in various disciplines. Already, from 2011 scores of graduated students, especially in the medical field, have returned home and are serving in the interests of the ordinary people.

The right to health is guaranteed by the National System of Health, totally financed by the State, with an extensive network of institutions, distributed throughout the country. Cuba's health indicators not only compares favourably to that of the developed world but is also indicative of the priority attention the Government pays to the health of its people.. In 2011 Cuba, for instance, infant death rate reached 4.9, the lowest rate in Latin American and the Caribbean.

Cuba shares her human capital many nations that do not have the same development in health sector. The Cuban government has driven several cooperation programmes and projects on health. With the "*Operación Milagro*" (Miracle Eye Operation), which started in 2004 and until January 2012, 2,261,987 surgical interventions have been performed in order to restore sight to millions of persons. Guyana is one of the countries which benefitted from this programme. Hundreds, mainly from the poorer sections of the Guyanese society were treated in Cuban through their programme.

Apart from the hundreds of scholarships in the medical field, we in Guyana must express our appreciation for the Cuban medical personnel in our Health system and who presently work in the service of our public medical institutions. We give recognition to Cuba's help in managing an Ophthalmology Centre and three (3) Diagnostic Centres located in several regions of the country in addition to consultancies which are also provided.

In the academic, intellectual and culture fields, we are aware that discussions and creative art are fostered; this is reflected in the amount of publications issued in the island and in the variety of works of art that the population enjoy. Culture is accessible to all social sectors and the government gives equal opportunities for the development of each citizen's potential.

As with education and health, the rights and facilities to culture and sports, enjoyed by Cuba's people are also extended to other countries on the basis of mutual agreements. Again, Guyana is a recipient of such arrangements in the field of sports particularly which cultural exchanges are on-going.

We are also encouraged by the efforts of the Cuban to protect the minorities and respect the sexual, racial, ethnic and gender diversity. Cuba's record in ensuring

the right to a decent job and the full exercise of the rights of the workers and trade unions is exemplary and is inspiring to us who are working at the trade union and political levels in Guyana. Those rights are guaranteed constitutionally and in the current Labour Code. Cuba has ratified 88 ILO Conventions.

We are dismayed that despite the strides made by Cuba in the field of human rights and its fulfillment of the recommendations during the first cycle of the UPR, certain political-media unjustly and wrongly carried out campaigns do not recognize these achievements of the country.

We cannot ignore or deny that Cuba has co-operated and co-operates with several humanitarian and human rights organizations throughout the world, both in their territory and in the development of international cooperation missions, including the cases of emergencies after natural disasters.

Such co-operation has been developed with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, Cuba's human rights have been strengthened by the decision in April 2009, when the Council of States decided to commute the death penalty sentence and replace it by 30 year of imprisonment or life sentence to inmates facing that penalty. The decision, we note, was taken as a sovereign act, in accordance to the humanitarian behavior and ethics of the Revolution since its beginning.