

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR A JUST WORLD

Pergerakan Keadilan Sedunia

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On the 1st of August 1992, Just World Trust was established. Five years later it was re-structured as a society under Malaysia's Societies Act with an open membership and a democratically elected leadership. Its present name is the International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

JUST is a society which seeks to develop global awareness of the injustice within the system with the aim of evolving an alternative international order which will enhance human dignity and social justice. More specifically, our primary goal is to establish a spiritual and intellectual foundation for a just world.

JUST runs a website; publishes a monthly bulletin (JUST Commentary); holds in-house forums, organizes an annual youth program; initiates public campaigns; networks with like-minded organisations, institutions and governments; and participates in seminars and conferences.

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW: CUBA

- 1) Human rights are indivisible. They are inter-linked and integrated. They should be approached from a holistic perspective. This is because the human being as a creation defies division and demarcation into separate entities and compartments. What this means is that political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights should be viewed as part and parcel of a single whole. Likewise, rights in the domestic sphere should not be separated from rights in the global arena. No one set of rights is more important than another set of rights.
- 2) It is against this philosophical backdrop that the question of human rights in Cuba should be understood and analyzed. Cuba has succeeded in protecting and enhancing the most fundamental of all human rights --- the right to life. It has done this partly through a comprehensive, effective health care system. Through neighborhood clinics, polyclinics and hospitals, the Cuban government provides free, good quality health care service to all its 11 million citizens. With one doctor for 159.2 persons, the Cuban ratio is perhaps the best in the world. The republic's infant mortality rate of 5.4 per 1000 is among the lowest in the world while the average Cuban can expect to live up to 77 years of age.
- 3) If access to health care is one of Cuba's great human rights accomplishments, so is its ability to provide elementary and secondary education to almost all its people. A huge network of kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools constitute the foundation of Cuba's education system. Like education at lower levels, college and university education is also free and therefore within the reach of anyone with the requisite qualifications.
- 4) The other human right which is also given concrete expression in Cuban society is gender equality. Not only are there equal opportunities for women in the workplace; in a number of critical professions there are in fact more women than men. For instance, 56 percent of all doctors are female. Women constitute 36 percent of the National Assembly and are well represented at all levels and in all spheres of public-decision making.
- 5) Cuba also protects the rights of the different cultural and religious communities. The island republic has achieved an appreciable degree of inter-cultural harmony since the 1959 Revolution. This is significant because Cuba was in the past a deeply segregated society with Whites enjoying privilege and prestige. Today there are equal opportunities for Blacks, Meztizos, (or people of mixed ancestry), minority groups such as the Chinese --- and the Whites. The various professions reflect the multi-racial and multi-ethnic integration of Cuban society. At the social level there is easy, uninhibited interaction among the different communities.
- 6) By reducing income differentials and socio-economic disparities, the Cuban government has also succeeded in creating a society which is more egalitarian than most other societies. There is no privileged economic class in the country, unlike the situation before the Revolution. If egalitarianism is pronounced, it is mainly because nationalized industries, collective enterprises

and people's cooperatives dominant the economy. Private ownership is severely limited. The equality that has become an established feature of society has given real meaning to human rights.

- 7) The Cuban leadership since the 1959 Revolution has also succeeded to a great extent to protect the right of the people to determine their own destiny, to the extent it is possible in a world dominated by a single superpower. The determination of a people to exercise their sovereignty, to preserve their independence enables a nation to uphold a collective human right which in a sense is as important as individual human rights. This collective human right has enhanced the dignity of the Cuban people in the international arena.
- 8) This is an achievement of tremendous significance given that wide-ranging, crippling sanctions have been imposed upon Cuba by the United States of America since 1961. These sanctions constitute a huge hindrance to Cuba's economic development. They have stymied the nation's progress in various spheres of life. It is not just sanctions. The US even attempted to invade Cuba in 1961--- the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. There have also been terrorist attacks on Cuban soil. A Cuban commercial airliner with children on board was brought down by terrorist fire. The leader of the Revolution, Fidel Castro, was for many decades the target of numerous CIA instigated assassination bids. In spite of all this, the Revolution has managed to sustain the independence and sovereignty of the republic and defend the honor and dignity of the people.
- 9) Apart from the hostility and antagonism of the US, the Cuban people also underwent a great deal of suffering when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The Soviet Union through its massive aid to Cuba from the early sixties onwards played a role in keeping the latter's economy functioning well. But its assistance came to an end with the Soviet collapse. Cuba entered into a phase which has been described by its leadership as "the special period." It had to fend for itself. Without the generous flow of Soviet oil, it had to re-conceptualize agriculture and decided to give priority to organic farming. Cuba also stepped up its research into bio-technology. Through its innovative response to the crisis it faced as an aid recipient nation, Cuba showed the world that it had the inner strength and the ability to preserve and enhance its independence and sovereignty--- against all odds.
- 10) Whatever its accomplishments, Cuba, unfortunately, is often presented to the world, especially by the US media, as a State that is ruthless in its suppression of the rights of its people. Often, by "rights" the critics of Cuba mean political rights. Do the Cuban people enjoy political rights? There is substantial participation in decision-making at the grassroots level. At higher levels there is also considerable debate on public policies. This debate includes criticisms of the State and its leaders. These criticisms are also broadcast by the Cuban media. This is why if perceptions created by US politicians and the media are separated from reality, one will realize that there is an active citizenry that participates in the political life of the nation.
- 11) The impression has also been created that there is zero tolerance for any form of criticism or dissent in Cuba. As I have indicated above, this is far from the truth. In fact, self-criticism is an established practice within the Communist Party of Cuba. The Party encourages the general public

to speak up. What the ruling elite does not tolerate are activists and intellectuals who are allegedly working hand in glove with those who are hell-bent on destroying Cuba's independence and sovereignty. Many such individuals have been jailed in the past.

12) It is not inconceivable that a handful of them may have been genuine, peaceful dissidents with a patriotic outlook. A State that incarcerates such critics should be held accountable. But it would be wrong to condemn it as a State that suppresses and oppresses its people without evaluating objectively its many accomplishments in various spheres of human rights. When human rights are appraised from a comprehensive, holistic perspective, Cuba stands tall among the comity of nations as a small, progressive State with a brilliant record of protecting and enhancing the dignity of all its citizens.

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Malaysia.

29 September 2012.