

Cuba Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

CIVIL SOCIETY FOR THE FOURTH CYCLE OF THE UPR WORKING GROUP OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

April 2023

The name of the submitting organization: **ASCAST**

The name of the country being reviewed: **Cuba**

Title: **The US Blockade on Cuba and the violations of civil rights:
ASCAST's experience**

Brief description of main activities of the organisation.

ASCAST is an independent and non-profit organisation working for the diffusion of knowledge in applied sciences, technology and innovation. First activities were carried out in 2016 by a group of Cuban and British researchers working in the United Kingdom (UK) willing to facilitate the exchange of scientific knowledge between both countries through research projects. The original name of the organisation was Academic Studies § Cuban Applied Science and Technology. In 2019 the organisation was registered in the Companies House in England and Wales with the name of ASCAST, company number 11979227. Today ASCAST works with academics, researchers and innovators in the Caribbean and with researchers in Britain and Europe to strengthen the international scientific collaboration. ASCAST has been involved in organising and participating in scientific meetings, conference, workshops, publications in scientific journals and supporting Cuban scientists visiting the UK for scientific collaboration. One of the activities having a greater impact in Cuba and in the Caribbean was the workshop on Positron Emission Tomography (PET)¹. In 2018 ASCAST was involved in finding sponsors to carry out the an international workshop on Positron Emission Tomography (PET) in Havana at the facilities of the Medical and Surgical Research Centre. This training course was part of the session on Radiopharmacy at the 33rd Latin American Congress in Chemistry (May 2018). The organization of the PET course in Havana was a collective effort from researchers in Cuba and abroad including the InSTEC (University of Havana), Division of Imaging Sciences (*King's College London*), *Ion Beam*

¹ Successful workshop in Havana <https://ascast.org.uk/successful-workshop-in-havana-positron-emission-tomography-technology-and-applications/>

Application, S.A. (Louvain-La-Neuve), n-POMOD (Zurich), Medical Surgical Research Centre (Havana), and National Isotope Centre (Havana).

Introduction

The organisation ASCAST has experienced the damaging consequences of the US sanctions on Cuba in many ways. Actions against Cuba are also against Cubans regardless where they lives and those actions are violations of the human rights.

The reputation of the effectiveness of the US Blockade on Cuba works against the international engagement in scientific projects for development because institutions/organisations know the difficulties they will have along the process of applying for a grant successfully. Moreover, as a consequence of the US Blockade, Cuban researcher institutions miss opportunities to apply online for grants in third countries due to US interference in Cuban communication system² (the speed of the Internet in Cuba accessing websites and databases). Science is a global endeavour nurtured by the international community of scientists. If the Cuban community of scientists is punished by such discrimination, the world also is punished because, the international community of scientists will be missing the input of that discriminated community of scientists. Sadly, this sustained pressure from the US Blockade acts as a factor of pulling young graduates away by seeking opportunities abroad for their advancement of science. Regrettable, the benefit of gaining highly educated developed professionals for free, goes to the developed world, including the country responsible for such migration, while hurting the Cuban effort to keep the younger generation of future scientists.

This report also covers a period in which the world has faced a pandemic that revealed how badly countries were prepared, even when the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of such risks long time ago. However, during the first year of the pandemic, Cuba, a Small Island Developing State, managed to control the propagation of the SARS-Cov 2 and kept low mortality in cases suffering the covid-19, and helps other countries in need by sending Cuban doctors to more than 40 countries³. Those achievement were possible due to the social system of Cuba investing consistently in Education and Health⁴ for

² Due to the U.S. blockade—Cuba still has no access to fibre optic cables that pass very close to their shores.

³ Global collaboration in times of covid-19.: Cuba's emergency Medical Contingent. Conner Gory MA, MEDICC Review, April 2020 (22)2:2, 64-66. http://mediccreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MR-April2020_COVID-19-Conner-Cuba-Global-Collaboration.pdf

⁴ Cuba's Biotechnology Revolution. Evenson, D. MEDICC Review, Fall 2007, 9:1, pp8-10 <http://mediccreview.org/cubas-biotechnology-revolution/>

decades. In Cuba, Education and Health are considered universal rights according to the article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. The Cuban government shown the political will to fully support and follow the scientific advice from Cuban experts in the fields of Tropical Medicine, Biotechnology and related disciplines to maximise the resources of the country, given the restrictions imposed by the US Blockade. On the other hand, It has been strongly criticised by international community of scientists⁵ and advocates of Human Rights⁶ the unacceptable policies of unilateral coercive sanctions on vulnerable countries during the pandemic. By the second year of the pandemic the Trump Administration had already implemented more than 200 measurement aiming to tighten the economic, commercial and financial sanctions on Cuba and therefore obstructing the trading of essential raw materials to produce medicines in the Cuban pharmaceutical industry, specially key reagents necessary for the production of the five Cuban vaccine candidates. In January 2021, Donald Trump last action as President (J. Biden was elected by the end of 2020) was the inclusion of Cuba in the List of States sponsors of terrorism, overturning all foreign policy positions of the Obama administration. This is one of the most powerful tool to implement the extraterritorial operations of the US Blockade, specially effective in the world financial sector⁷. Cuba couldn't buy spare parts to repair old pulmonary ventilators that were crucial to patients suffering covid-19, because the original firm Acutronic and IMTmedical (located in Switzerland and Germany) were acquired by a Chicago-based Vyaire Medical firm and therefore implemented the US law in foreign territory. Thus the extraterritorial implementation of the US Blockade became another weapon against Cubans in need.

The interference of the US Blockade on the civil rights: ASCAST's experience

⁵ Economic sanctions on countries are indiscriminate weapons and should be banned. Choonara, I., Bonati, M., Jonas P. British Medical Journal (2021) 5: 2001350.

⁶ COVID-19 pandemic: humanitarian concerns and negative impact of unilateral sanctions and their exemptions . Douhan A., Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights. United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures (2020) PALAIS DES NATIONS • 1211 GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND

⁷ Obviously, ending the terrorism was not exactly the main interest of Trump. Trump also overturned another policy of the Obama era by allowing the production and deploy of landmines, a well known to produce disproportionate harm in civilian.<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/30/trump-policy-change-landmines-obama>

1. Accounting for the interference in regular scientific affairs: ASCAST interacted with researchers working at the Finlay Institute of Tropical Medicine in Cuba (2019) in order to apply for a Wellcome Trust Grant. The final documentation required in the application process failed to arrive to destination in London, due to slow Internet communication. This situation affect all the scientific institutions willing to compite for grant applications offered to developing countries. The effort of ASCAST working with both institutions, Wellcome Trust and Finlay Institute of Tropical Medicine found strong barriers to create opportunities for international collaboration between both countries given the ongoing sanctions and restrictions on Cuba. No further actions were taken by ASCAST to improve this situation due to changes in working conditions generated by the pandemic.
2. ASCAST reported to the Financial Conduct Authority (27/05/2019) the unacceptable conduct of Transfer Wise bank (now Wise bank) asking to comply the extraterritorial US law against Cuba to be applied in British soil to a British company. ASCAST is a non-profit organization working to promote scientific collaboration between the Caribbean region and UK. The Caribbean region has strong cultural and economic links with the UK, however scientific collaboration has not been the front line area of achievement. There is a potential for ASCAST to create a platform to fill this void, but Cuba is one of the key links of this network and should not be excluded. Cubans represent almost 30% of the Caribbean population generating 48% of the region's GDP with a scientific output of 57% of the region according to the UNESCO Science Report of 2015, counting the scientific publications between 2008 and 2013. [see Annex 1, 2 and 3]
3. ASCAST responded to the call of Cuban scientists and joined the organization "Cubanos en UK" in actions to ameliorate the harm caused by the extraterritorial application of the US Blockade during the process of acquiring spare parts and new technology to build new ventilators. ASCAST contacted British engineers from King's College London and from the UCL Institute of Healthcare Engineering that were willing to collaborate with Cuban scientists and engineers. Finally, in July 2020, the UCL Institute of Healthcare Engineering donated to researchers in the Cuban Neuroscience Centre the Blueprint and a prototype of their innovation in the CPAP (continuous positive airways pressure) device to be used in the manufacturing of new ventilators in Cuba. The solidarity and international scientific collaboration were invaluable help to counteract the US Blockade in the first production of Cuban pulmonary ventilators.

4. In 2021 while Cuban scientists and medical doctors were fully involved in saving lives and carrying out clinical trials to submit the necessary documentation for the approval of the first Cuban vaccines against the SARS-Cov 2, small riots were reported in few neighbourhoods, probably due to the exhausted population after long lockdowns and the scarcity of food and goods. Those disturbs were not unique to Cuba but were used by the media in Miami, Florida to build a false argument to the world about the critical situation due to a failure system in Cuba and demand an humanitarian intervention by US in Cuba (Campaign S.O.S Cuba). Humanitarian Interventions are always made with the help of the army, making the whole situation extremely dangerous to Cuba and the region. At this moment ASCAST found appropriate to contact senior British scientists and members of the Royal Society that know well the Cuban Health System and Biotechnology asking for ideas to defuse the dangerous situation generated around Cuba through Science Diplomacy and promoting a talk between the Academies of Sciences of Cuba and the United States of America. Before ASCAST went further, the Cuban Academy of Science made a Declaration that ASCAST endorsed and published in its website^{8,9}.

Conclusion

ASCAST has witness and experienced the illegal, irrational and inhumane consequences of the US policy on Cuba that go beyond coercive and unilateral sanctions against Cuban population, but also includes a media war distorting the Cuban values and culture. The effect of the US policy on Cuba is detrimental to the development of the Cuban scientific community and the necessary international collaboration and therefore, it is also detrimental to the benefit that Science, Technology and Innovation might generate to the economy and welfare of the country. ASCAST urges to the Universal Periodic Review to find ways to held accountable the administrations of the United States of America for all the harm inflicted by their actions to Cuban population, and that deserves to be compensated. ASCAST calls to the international community to take actions to end the sanctions on Cuba and restore the right to build a better society in peace and in harmony with nature.

⁸ <https://ascast.org.uk/ascast-science-diplomacy-and-cuba/>

⁹ <https://ascast.org.uk/cuban-academy-of-sciences-2021/>