

Note: The numeration of this submission is keyed in order to Cuba's May 7-18, 2018, document, "National Report Submitted In Accordance With Paragraph 5 of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21." All responses report on the personal, direct, in-country (except as otherwise noted) experiences of Friends of Latin America (FoLA) members, with emphasis on the period elapsed since the last (3rd Cycle) review.

With respect to Cuba's item #3:

"During the period covered, the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba continued, and its extraterritorial application was reinforced, especially in the financial sector. This policy is the main obstacle to the development of Cuba and constitutes a flagrant violation of the human rights of its people. In this difficult context, the country has continued to make progress in the process of updating its model of economic and social development."

One of our members, Samira Addrey, M.D., attended and graduated from ELAM, Latin America School of Medicine, Havana, Cuba, from 2012 to 2020. Dr. Addrey has continued to work with ELAM and other Cuba-engaged organizations since 2020. In her various capacities, Dr. Addrey has witnessed first-hand, and her ongoing work has variously suffered from, the increased pressure placed on the Cuban government financially as a result of the additional restrictions imposed during the Trump administration and upheld by the Biden administration. For example, Dr. Addrey is personally impacted by the current challenges of ELAM in completing an international accreditation process that requires payment to an external entity, with which, due to the extraterritorial application of the US blockade measures, the payment has not yet cleared, therefore delaying the possibility of the on-site evaluation required to complete the process.

With respect to Cuba's item #20:

"The use of weapons is subject to more stringent controls by the competent authorities, as their use is limited to activities pertaining to the defense of the country and of domestic order. There is no sale or trafficking of firearms nor is there easy access to them."

As one of us, Samira Addrey, M.D., lived, studied and worked in Havana, Cuba, from 2012 to 2020, her personal experience on the streets of Havana was to never see a police officer carrying a weapon as he/she patrolled the streets. In her hundreds of hours in the emergency department at Enrique Cabrera Teaching Hospital, Havana, Dr. Addrey saw only one case of a gunshot wound, which was a case in which the gun was homemade.

With respect to Cuba's item #23:

"Protecting the lives of persons deprived of their liberty is a high priority for the Cuban Government. All prisons have health facilities, medical and nursing personnel and sufficient resources and materials to guarantee the right to free medical care. When an illness cannot be treated within the prison system, the inmate in question receives care in the national hospital system, without discrimination."

One of us, Samira Addrey, M.D., while working and studying in Enrique Cabrera Teaching Hospital, Havana, witnessed a prisoner's course of care for a non-life-threatening health problem. The patient-prisoner stayed on the Internal Medicine service for over one week. He was accompanied by a police officer, in a room with other patients from the general population, without any handcuffs placed on him.

With respect to Cuba's item #29:

"In Cuba, there is a wide-ranging debate on a wide variety of issues pertaining to the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation and the world at large. Television, radio and other mass media facilitate access to truthful and timely information and enable the public to participate in the discussion of national and international affairs."

One of us, Samira Addrey, M.D., benefited, during the COVID-19 pandemic, from daily press conferences and reports from different ministries during the daily round table discussions, keeping her informed on all the adjustments being made and responses to the critiques and questions that the Cuban people were posing to the ministries.

With respect to Cuba's item #33:

"In 2015, by-elections were held which resulted in the election of 12,589 delegates to the municipal assemblies of the People's Power. The right to vote was exercised voluntarily by 7,563 million voters, or 88.3 per cent of the citizens qualified to vote; over 92 per cent of the ballots were valid."

One of our members, epidemiologist Rachel Viqueira, MHS, directly witnessed the election process first-hand for the delegates of circumscription, the most grassroots level of elections, on November 27, 2022. She observed at the voting site that there were no advertisements or solicitations, just three sheets with descriptions of the candidates - all women - who ranged in age from early twenties to early sixties. Ms. Viqueira saw that volunteers very quickly and easily checked in the voters, who had a private place to cast their votes, and then placed their votes into ballot boxes. Young volunteers from the community also observed this process throughout the time she was there.

With respect to Cuba's item #34:

"In June 2017, the Council of State, acting in accordance with the Constitution and the Elections Act (Act No. 72 of 1992), convened general elections for delegates to the municipal assemblies for two-and-a-half-year terms, and for delegates to provincial assemblies and deputies to the National Assembly of the People's Power for five-year terms."

One of our members, Camila Piñero Harnecker, M.S., Ph.D., is Cuban-American, having been born in Cuba, first coming to the United States from Cuba in 2003, earning a Masters of Science degree from UC Berkeley in Sustainable Development, and then a Ph.D., in Economics from Havana University. Dr. Piñero returns to Cuba very often and gave birth to both of her children in Cuba. Dr. Piñero Harnecker personally witnessed one of the 12,515 neighborhood "circunscripción" meetings held around Cuba in the Fall of 2017, which selected 60,700 municipal government candidates for two-and-a-half year terms. These meetings were advertised in advance and did not require any party affiliation in order to participate either as a candidate or to propose a candidate. Of the 60,700 proposed candidates, 27,221 received enough votes to be officially nominated as a municipal delegate, which is considered the most important step in the Cuban electoral process. This was the start of an electoral process that culminated in the election of Deputies of the National Assembly - 52% of whom are women - and the April 19, 2018, election of the National Assembly President, Vice President, and Secretary, the Council of State, and the new Prime Minister, Miguel Diaz Canel, the highest positions of the Cuban government. Dr. Piñero Harnecker was able to witness as much as she did as the voting process is transparent and anyone who wants to observe the voting in a voting location can do so.

With respect to Cuba's item #38:

"Discussions on the documents Conceptualizacion del Modelo Económico y Social Cubano de Desarrollo Socialista and Bases para el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Económico y Social hasta 2030 involved more than 1.6 million citizens, including more than 500 young people, at 47,470 meetings which generated 208,161 proposals, which in turn led to changes being made in a substantial part of the original texts of those documents."

Our member, Camila Piñero Harnecker, M.S., Ph.D., personally witnessed neighborhood and workplace meetings in which citizens reviewed the "Conceptualization" document and the "Basis for the National Development Plan," voicing their opinions, debating with others and building consensus, which is a highly deliberative and inclusive participatory process and one of the most crucial for Cubans to chart their future as the Cuban nation. These adjusted documents were then approved by the National Assembly and the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), becoming guiding documents for the Cuban government.

With respect to Cuba's item #41:

"With the ability to initiate legislation, some Cuban civil society organizations promote laws in favour of human rights for part or all of the population... For example, the Cuban Women's Federation proposed and promoted amendments to the Act on Maternity Leave for Working Women in order to facilitate equal treatment for women and men as they exercise their right to participate in caring for their newborn children, with the guarantee of paid leave and job security..."

Our member, Camila Piñero Harnecker, M.S., Ph.D., specifically recalls when the amendments to the Act on Maternity Leave were put in place, as she herself, as a mother, was able to benefit from them. She enjoyed, in total, one year and three months of maternity leave pre- and post-partum, with job guarantee and 60% wage. She was then able to return to her job and be a happy mother and professional.

With respect to Cuba's item #50:

"Cuba constantly fights against all forms of discrimination through laws, policies and programmes. The Constitution recognizes the equality of all citizens and prohibits discrimination. The Criminal Code penalizes all kinds of discrimination."

Our member, Camila Piñero Harnecker, M.S., Ph.D., has lived and studied extensively in Cuba, and has the insight from her lived experience that human dignity is understood in Cuba as equal rights and access to basic goods and services such as food, medicines, housing, health care, education, and culture. Public institutions educate citizens on the equality of rights and the need to confront any type of discrimination. The recent passing of the Families Code on September 25, 2022, was a great victory against discrimination based on gender identity.

With respect to Cuba's item #87:

"Children with disabilities participate in all activities organized for children and adolescents and benefit from the same general protection to ensure their full development. They have unrestricted access to the free universal national education system, including

special education for persons with some type of intellectual disability who need specialized care. The Ministry of Education is working to improve teacher training with a view to improving the quality of services for children with special educational needs... ”

One of our members, Mark Ginsburg, Ph.D., worked as a Visiting Professor at the Universidad de Ciencias Pedagógicas, Havana, Cuba, for two semesters, from 2017 to 2019. During this time, Dr. Ginsburg additionally visited various preschool through higher educational institutions in several provinces. Dr. Ginsburg attests that in his first-hand experience during this time, children with disabilities participated in all activities organized for children and adolescents, including having unrestricted access to the free universal national education system.

With respect to Cuba’s item #90:

“Cuba has continued to consolidate the quality of its health-care system, which provides universal coverage and free assistance. It is the country with the best ratio of doctors per inhabitants, according to the World Health Organization. Life expectancy at birth was 78.4 years in 2015. The mortality rate for children under 1 stands at 4.3 per 1,000 live births. The health system gives priority to following up on maternal and child health. In 2016, the mortality rate for children under 5 was reduced to 5.5 per 1,000 live births. That age group has a survival rate of 99.4, and 99.9 per cent of deliveries take place in health institutions.”

One of us, Samira Addrey, M.D., living, studying and working in Cuba from 2012 to 2020, attests through personal experience of both receiving and delivering health care, that Cuba has continued to consolidate the quality of its health-care system, providing universal coverage and free assistance.

Another of us, Rachel Viqueira, MHS, witnessed how her roommate, another traveler, was provided free care, food, and lodging after being diagnosed with COVID-19 in July, 2022. For seven days, doctors in Santa Clara visited the sick person in isolation, treated symptoms, and tested them. The doctors completed a detailed history for contact tracing. Ms. Viqueira witnessed another traveler on that same trip suffer from an allergic reaction. Within 30 minutes, she was able to see a doctor, be diagnosed, and be treated. Ms. Viqueira witnessed doctors visit the patient where she was staying for follow-up for two days after. All of this was done completely free of charge and with great care on the part of the doctors.

With respect to Cuba’s item #99:

“Priority is given to creating material conditions and training the human capital needed to ensure quality education for all, with free universal coverage at all levels of education, irrespective of gender, skin colour, household income, religion and political opinions or ideas of the students or their families.”

One of us, Mark Ginsburg, Ph.D., worked as a Visiting Professor at the Universidad de Ciencias Pedagógicas, Havana, for two semesters, from 2017 to 2019. During this time, Dr. Ginsburg additionally visited various preschool through higher educational institutions in several provinces. Dr. Ginsburg’s personal experience throughout this time included giving priority to creating material conditions and training the human capital needed to ensure quality education for all, with free universal coverage, at all levels of education, offering programs to initially prepare and further develop teachers and other education personnel.

With respect to Cuba’s item #115:

“Policies are aimed at enhancing equity and promoting equal opportunities and protection for those most in need. These include providing subsidies to families who do not have the

means to contribute towards solving the housing deficit, helping them build, renovate and maintain their dwellings, implementing a policy on bank loans and lowering prices for more than 122 items of construction materials.”

One of us, Rachel Viqueira, MHS, witnessed housing being rebuilt in three different locations in Pinar del Rio, in February, 2023, after the housing had been destroyed by Hurricane Ian in September, 2022, prioritizing residents who were the most vulnerable and had suffered the greatest losses. The houses were all built to withstand future hurricanes by employing new, improved designs with the limited materials available to the Cuban people. One house in particular was being rebuilt for a woman with six children, relying on bricks made in Pinar del Rio. Workers from as far as two hours away testified to their dedication to rebuilding the housing to support their fellow citizens in their time of need.

With respect to Cuba’s item #133:

“As of the 2015–2016 school year, 73,548 foreign students had graduated in Cuba. Of these, 18,798 had completed upper secondary and mid-level technical education; 53,714 had completed the tertiary level, including 34,205 in the medical sciences. Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 87.3 per cent of the foreign graduates.”

One of us, Samira Addrey, M.D., as a citizen of the United States, attended and graduated from ELAM, Latin America School of Medicine, Havana, Cuba, from 2012 to 2020, and, like all ELAM students, was not charged any tuition.

Another of us, Rachel Viqueira, MHS, attended a student cultural fair at ELAM, in November, 2022. Students from all over the world were tabling and sharing their cultures with each other, including students from Palestine, Southeast Asia, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Africa.

With respect to Cuba’s item #151(g):

“Cuba’s priorities in the area of human rights are... (g) To continue calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States Government against Cuba, censured almost unanimously by States members of the United Nations. The embargo violates the human rights of all the Cuban people and is qualified as an act of genocide under the 1948 Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”

Friends of Latin America, headquartered in Columbia, Maryland, joins with the United Nations General Assembly in calling for an end to this unilateral coercive measure against our neighbors in Cuba.

With respect to Cuba’s item #152(c):

“The problems and obstacles that prevent greater promotion and protection of human rights in Cuba are (c) The political and media campaigns against Cuba, which distort or spread lies about the country’s situation in order to impose negative opinions about democracy and the enjoyment of the human rights of Cubans.”

All members of our organization, Friends of Latin America, headquartered in Columbia, Maryland, bear witness through first-hand experience within the geographical borders of the United States to the ongoing political and media campaign against Cuba.

With respect to Cuba's item #154:

"The laws, institutions and functions of the Cuban State are based on the exercise of power by the great majority of workers, intellectuals, professionals and artists. There is a broad and active civil society. Cubans participate effectively and systematically in decision-making processes, not only in the political and electoral context, but also in the economic, social and cultural spheres."

Several of our members, including Leslie Salgado and Scott D. Hagaman, M.D., attended a neighborhood Committee for the Defense of the Revolution outdoor meeting in Camagüey City, Cuba, on the evening of April 27, 2018.

Respectfully Submitted,
Friends of Latin America
Leslie Salgado, Chairperson
Scott D. Hagaman, M.D., Corresponding Member
April 2, 2023