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ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟΣ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΟΣ "ΧΟΣΕ ΜΑΡΤΙ" **ΑΛΛΗΛΕΓΓΥΗ με την ΚΟΥΒΑ**

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Established: 2009

Our Association was established in 2009. Its main objectives are:

- The defence of the right of the Cuban people to freely determine their future, against any foreign intervention.
- Cultural interchange between Cuban and Greek peoples.
- Dissemination of the work and legacy of Cuba’s national hero and poet Jose Marti to the Greek people and youth.

On one hand many of our members and friends visit, each year Cuba (in various contexts) and on the other we maintain a strong contact with Cubans who live in Greece (some of them are also members of the Association) so we are constantly aware of the situation in the Republic of Cuba and the sentiment of its people.

We are sending you the following letter, regarding your examination of human rights in the Republic of Cuba (as we did in your previous session six years ago). The defense and expansion of human rights is a vital part of our activity (both collectively as an Association and individually of each member), and it is in this light, that we address the committee for the second time.

1. Human rights are constitutionally guaranteed rights, which are constantly updated and expanded in Cuba.
 - 1.1. With the adoption of the new Constitution in 2019, a broad legislative update took place in the country within which human rights were strengthened. The Family Code, which was passed into law in 2022 by plebiscite, went one step further, reshaping the equality clause and the principle of non-discrimination, by incorporating new categories of groups vulnerable to discrimination such as on the basis of age, disability, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, ethnic and territorial origin.
 - 1.2. We followed the process through which the new Family Code was adopted, which included the presentation and analysis of the initial proposal in face to face meetings as well as in the media, but also discussions in Cuba's mass organizations, in workplaces and schools. What particularly struck us (apart from the Code itself and the broadening of its scope relative to the previous family code), was the process through which it was modified and approved. More than 6 million people participated in 79,000 meetings of popular consultation, resulting in more than half of the original text being amended prior to its final adoption in Cuba's legislative body. The code was then put a plebiscite, in which it was approved by 66,85 % on 25 September 2022. This clearly shows the high level of respect for human rights in the country, but also how these rights are safeguarded through the active participation of the population.
2. Cuba views public health as a fundamental human right and as the responsibility of the state to provide.
 - 2.1. Health care in Cuba is not only provided universally and free of charge without any kind of discrimination but it is also of high quality. During the pandemic, Cuba's medical care gained worldwide recognition, both for its scientific achievements, with the production of a series of its own vaccines, but also with the action of the Cuban Medical Brigade "Henry Reeve", which brought the medical assistance, experience and high medical training of Cuban doctors to a number of countries affected by COVID -19. In our country, this action by Cuba made a great impression. An intense public debate developed, with articles on social media, through events, and television programs, which enabled us to familiarize ourselves with many aspects of the Cuban health system. The result of all this discussion requests were submitted to several municipalities and regions of Greece (e.g. Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece) to formally request that the Medical Brigade contribute its assistance to our country. Additionally, the "Greek Initiative for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize to the Cuban Doctors" was formed, which finally submitted its request to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, accompanied by over 200,000 signatures of Greek citizens who supported the proposal.
 - 2.2. However, at the same time as Cuba's scientific level and universal contributions were internationally recognized, the blockade by the United States, which even during the pandemic continued to be imposed with almost no changes, caused serious problems for the country – most notably difficulties in procuring syringes to administer vaccines. This, a

country that produced a series of its own vaccines was in danger of being unable to provide them to its population, due to the US embargo! This was another event that made a great impression and was hotly debated in our country. Thus, a series of campaigns were organized by various mass organizations as a result of which, with the contribution of thousands of our fellow citizens, medical material was collected and sent to the island.

3. Cuba has a high quality, universal educational system at all levels of education, which is accessible to all without discrimination. Cuba has always been a hospitable island and a beautiful destination, attracting many visitors, among them our fellow citizens and several of our members, too. People traveled there to get to know the island and its inhabitants, its past and present. In recent years, however, we have seen our fellow citizens go to Cuba and stay there, taking part in scientific programs, in the context of postgraduate or even doctoral research, while recently we have also had the launch of inter-university programs with universities in our country. The experience that our fellow citizens brought us to events and meetings we had with them, attest to:
 - 3.1. The high level of the Universities and Research Institutions of the island, with excellent building facilities and frequent organization of international conferences for the exchange of scientific knowledge and views
 - 3.2. The fact that academic staff stands out not only for their scientific training, but also for their high level of commitment to students, their modesty and approachability.
 - 3.3. The social activism of the students of the island, who participate among the first whenever extraordinary circumstances demand it (during emergencies such as hurricanes, such as hurricane Ian which recently hit Cuba); their noteworthy involvement in culture and sports; and the appreciation and recognition of their representative bodies throughout Cuban society
4. The only systematic and blatant violation of human rights in relation to Cuba is imposed externally: It is the commercial, economic and financial blockade that the country has been subjected to, for more than six decades, by the United States. The blockade is a massive and systematic violation of the human rights of the Cuban people. It violates International Law, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the rules of free trade. The problems faced by the Cuban people as a result of this blockade are multifaceted; they are substantial and create long-lasting wounds. The blockade violates not only the human rights of the Cuban people, but also the sovereign right of all citizens of the world to interact with Cuba without fear of punishment. We also experienced the difficulties it creates, especially in cases where we were trying to send financial or material assistance to the island during the pandemic, in order to address the shortages that the lockdown itself created (as in the example of the syringes mentioned above). It is no coincidence that this unilateral blockade has for decades been condemned almost unanimously by the UN General Assembly. Yet the USA remains completely indifferent to the opinion of the international community.

5. As we mention in the preamble, we are deeply committed to the defense of human rights. Our activity in solidarity with Cuba is firmly based precisely on the fact that we have determined –through dozens of broadly attended events, meetings with representatives of the Cuban people, actions with mass organizations of Cuba, and hundreds of visits to the island of by our fellow citizens – that human rights in Cuba are not only being respected, they are being extended and safeguarded in every way. Moreover, they enjoy an environment in which they can fully develop: an environment of universally available public health, public education, where employment is a right. This is the environment created by the people of Cuba through the construction of socialism, as part of an effort begun in 1959 when they shook off the yoke of the Batista dictatorship. Thus they ensured an enviable level of democracy and freedom. This project continues to advance through the action and mobilization of the entire population, the basic guarantor of its own rights.

6. The crucial obstacle to the aspirations of the Cuban people to the development which they deserve is the commercial, trade and financial blockade imposed for more than six decades by the United States. During the recent pandemic, the blockade could have become an instrument of real genocide, were it not for the will and capacities of the Cuban people, the international solidarity efforts through People’s Diplomacy and the crucial intervention of the UN with its multiple exhortations and decisions.

We repeat that the assessments we express here are not simply the result of studying authoritative reports, including those of the UN and other international bodies (such as the World Health Organization). They are also based on the constant contact we have with Cuba through yearly visits of dozens of our members and friends, some of whom live among the Cuban population for months at a time and communicate freely and without mediation with countless Cubans; they hear their views and are in daily contact with ordinary Cuban citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your Commission on this very important issue.