

# Rock Around the Blockade

BCM BOX 5909, London WC1N 3XX

020 7837 1743 / 0207 837 1688

office@ratb.org.uk

www.ratb.org.uk



**For the attention of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:  
contribution on CUBA in 2023**

## **Statement from Rock Around the Blockade, Britain.**

- 1) Rock Around the Blockade is a British organisation that actively campaigns in solidarity with the Cuban revolution, demands an end to the inhumane US blockade of Cuba, an end to the extra-territorial application of the US blockade in Britain and Europe, the removal of Cuba from the US list of states that sponsor terrorism and the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison and US Naval base which illegally occupy Cuba's territory.
- 2) Cuba has an excellent Human Rights record. Chapter V of Cuba's 2019 constitution 'Rights, duties and guarantees' sets out guarantees of human rights and freedoms in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These human rights are actively pursued, including the right to life, liberty and inviolability and integrity of the person; the right to work with rest and leisure and to social security. In addition Cuba has an outstanding commitment to ensuring its citizen's basic needs are met, guaranteeing free healthcare and education up to and including university level to all. Cuba also ensures that its citizens are guaranteed a basic basket of food necessary to promote good nutrition.
- 3) In April 2019 Rock Around the Blockade held our 14<sup>th</sup> solidarity brigade to Cuba. Our visit coincided with the inauguration of Cuba's new constitution, supported by 86% of voters, produced by an outstanding exercise in participatory democracy

in which 8.9 million Cubans took part. We met with Teresa Viera, a municipal delegate from the municipality of Cerro, Havana, visited a CDR (Committee for the Defence of the Revolution) in Altabo (Havana, Barrio Number 1, Zone 102, Boyeros municipality), who gave testimony to the high levels of democratic participation. The CDRs are central to Cuba's system of grassroots, participatory democracy, organising everything from vaccination plans, blood donations and pest control, to holding constitutional consultations debates. More than 8 million Cubans participate in their local CDR, (88% of people over 14). We also exchanged with members of the University students union FEU at Havana university who had been involved with projects to improve digital inclusion and enable digital consultation on the new constitution, improving youth and student engagement. Building on this, Havana FEU students had developed 'portales del ciudadano' (citizens' portals) websites which were being trialled in three local municipalities, further connecting citizens and their elected delegates.

- 4) Cuba has been a leading example since the 2006 World Wide Fund for Nature 'Living Planet' Report identified it as the only country to achieve a high level of human development alongside a low ecological footprint. Cuba's planned economy geared to meet human needs makes this possible. On our brigade we saw how the Leonor Perez organic co-operative supported recovery of unfertile land using wormeries and manure. At 'La Rosita' farm we learnt permaculture and agro-ecology techniques. We met with representatives of CubaSolar, who emphasised popular power in promoting renewable energy and efficiency, community by community. CubaSolar has even adapted solar panels for electric wheelchair users. 'Tarea Vida' is a 100-year plan to protect against the effects of global warming. Dagoberto Lopez Perez, director at 'La Rosita' explained 'we are moving low lying populations further inland, preventing new housing construction in areas prone to sea flooding. We are breeding strains of crops resistant to higher temperatures. The revolution is preparing, climate change is coming.'

- 5) We held an exchange with CENESEX (National Centre for Sexual Education) who explained the holistic support offered to trans people in Cuba. There is virtually no waiting time for referrals, and mental health support is provided not just for the person transitioning, but for family members also. At CENESEX, research specialist Anabelkis Perdomo Caceres discussed trans-healthcare, explaining that anyone can ‘just come and knock’ and get support through TransCuba, a large social network established 17 years ago. Transitioning is free under the universal health system, including in-depth psychological and social preparation.
  
- 6) Since our visit, in 2022, the people of Cuba voted in the country’s new Family Code. This recognises and legalises all expressions of families within Cuba. It also updates other aspects of Cuban society that campaigners from across the island thought were lacking in the original Family Code – introduced in 1975 – such as LGBT rights, adoption laws and redefined rights for seniors and children. Out of 6,251,786 eligible voters, 74% turned out to vote. Of these, a majority of 67% approved the Family Code. Around six million Cubans participated in tens of thousands of meetings in workplaces, neighbourhoods and mass organisations to discuss and debate the first draft of the Code. Cuban nationals living outside of Cuba were also involved in this, discussing and debating with an online copy of the code opened to allow questions or additions to be sent through. In-person meetings were also held at Cuban embassies for further discussion. The critiques and suggestions that came out of these discussions were taken into consideration; many were accepted and helped to form the final draft, which was the 25th version. This was composed of 471 articles and 117 pages, and was released to Cubans on 25 September to allow the referendum voting process to begin.
  
- 7) In 2019 we met with Diana Rodriguez of the Cuban Women’s Federation who highlighted the Evolucionaria campaign against sexual harassment on the street. We saw their billboards on roadsides. Today women make up 53% of parliament, 65% of professionals.

- 8) We volunteered at a construction site, part of an effort to rebuild 5,330 homes destroyed by a rare tornado in January 2019. At the time of our visit in April 2019, over 80% of the homes destroyed by the tornado had already been rebuilt. The Ministry of Industry consulted the community, drawing up plans. Volunteer labour brigades are trained by professional workers whilst municipalities produce and recover whatever building materials they can. The US blockade of Cuba makes house-building expensive. However, the commitment is to rebuild to a higher standard. Nationally, the construction programme aims for each municipality to produce and source enough materials to build two houses (338 nationally) per month.
  
- 9) Cuba's internationalist health programmes have benefited 186 countries. We visited ELAM (Latin American School of Medicine) that has trained 29,139 doctors for free so they can serve impoverished communities in their home countries. We met students from Palestine, Sudan and Western Sahara. ELAM has even trained 84 students from the US.
  
- 10) We visited the Che Guevara Pioneers' Palace, one of 180 centres which facilitates school children to develop new vocational interests. The Pioneers are an organised body, they hold a regular national congress at which they question members of the council of the state, they guard the ballot boxes during elections. The children are supported to learn important skills and pursue interests and gain confidence through presenting their findings. At the William Soler school for multiple, complex educational needs we saw how children were supported from birth to 19 years, with the focus on education and life skills.
  
- 11) The role of online media and democracy within media and political discussion was prominent in our exchange with CubaDebate, Cuba's most visited website. This theme was also present in our exchanges with the Hermanos Saiz Association, which organises over 3,000 young artists and the Casa de Las Americas. We discussed unfounded claims of censorship in relation to Article 349 with artists who told us Article 349 is not against artistic creation but rather

protects the rights of artists once their work is commercialised. Cuban artists themselves pushed for the protection of their culture, removing racist, sexist or distorted content from public spaces.

12) Universal access to music, culture, sport and education is central to inclusion. El Principe community centre, a hive of activity with regular music, art and theatre sessions for the youth and elderly, alcoholics anonymous meetings, drop-ins for psychological wellbeing and social assistance, martial arts and capoeira classes, as well as regular concerts and community gatherings. At the 'New Life' day centre, we learnt about the integral programme for older people: physical activity, affordable day centres, care homes where clothing, shoes and pocket money are covered, even special university courses with 18,000 graduates in Havana alone. The older generations who made the revolution are recognised and protected. No-one is left behind.

13) Rock Around the Blockade and others supported a petition to the UK government in 2020 imploring the government to learn from Cuba's response to the covid19 pandemic [Petition · Britain to collaborate with Cuba on COVID-19 · Change.org](#) Since the Revolution of 1959, Cuban socialism has placed human welfare, not profit at the centre of development. The need for this approach is made starkly clear in the context of this pandemic. Socialist Cuba reacted quickly to the disease, establishing a prevention and control plan in January 2020 to prepare medical facilities and staff. Cuba's biopharma industry produces nearly 70% of the medicines consumed domestically and exports to 50 countries. Prior to the development of any vaccines worldwide, Particular efficacy against organ failure was being demonstrated by Cuba's Interferon Alfa 2b Human Recombinant (marketed as Heberon), an anti-viral drug produced in Cuba since 1986 and in China since 2003 through a Cuban-Chinese joint venture. Heberon is not licensed in the UK despite these results. Cuba has now developed five Covid-19 vaccines with the Abdala vaccine achieving an efficacy of 99% in preventing death. and vaccinated over 90% of its population for free including children over 2 years old.

- 14) Rock Around the blockade acknowledges the important humanitarian action Cuba took in accepting and treating the 682 mainly British passengers of the MS Braemar in April 2020. The cruise ship was stranded in the Caribbean after experiencing an outbreak of Covid-19. After the Bahamas and Barbados refused to allow the ship to dock, Cuba proved its commitment to human rights by accepting and treating the passengers before supporting them to return home.
- 15) Cuba has maintained this excellent commitment to the lives of its citizens and oppressed people of the world despite the continuing US economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba which has cost the country more than \$144 billion and constitutes a violation of the United Nations Charter and all norms of international law. The Trump administration enacted 243 new suffocating measures to reinforce the blockade against Cuba, and Biden has left them entirely intact.
- 16) Rock Around the Blockade participates in an international campaign 'One cent for Cuba (1c4Cuba [www.1c4cuba.eu](http://www.1c4cuba.eu)) which aims to expose and campaign against the extra-territorial application of the US blockade by banks in Britain and Europe. Through participating in this campaign we have found that bank transactions between European countries are blocked if they reference 'Cuba' despite the fact that these transactions are not destined to Cuba. In one case a transaction from Britain to Belgium for a Cuba T shirt was rejected. In the case of Ireland, even national transactions within the Republic of Ireland are blocked if they reference 'Cuba'. Complaints to the banks and the independent financial regulators are in process.
- 17) The #1c4Cuba campaign has exposed the collaboration of British banks in enforcing US sanctions against Cuba by blocking transactions. Such activity is in violation of the Extraterritorial US Legislation (Protection of Trading Interests) Order 1996 amongst other UK laws and EU law. Lloyds Bank contacted the holder of the British bank account of the #1c4Cuba campaign on 14 October to announce it would close the account without giving notice or explanation; the

campaign has already exposed instances of Lloyds blocking international transactions that mention the word 'Cuba'. Metrobank has routinely blocked transactions stating they are 'outside the risk appetite of the bank'. Metrobank also closed down two bank accounts of customers making transactions referencing 'Cuba' without explanation. Another British bank, NatWest, rejected a payment to Cuba's August 2022 Matanzas fire relief fund, and gave the customer a bogus excuse for this callous policy: 'Cuba is still on our sanctioned list, and we have to abide with the international laws.' Such laws are a fiction. Cuba is not subject to any British, European or international sanctions, only unilateral US sanctions.

18) In 1996, the British Parliament approved Order No. 3171, the Protection of Trading Interests Act, on 'The Extraterritorial US Legislation', which enables the British government to penalise any natural or legal person complying with extraterritorial aspects of US blockade on British territory. The EU, of which the UK was a member, similarly passed European Council Regulation (EC) No. 2271/96. On 29 January 2019, George Hollingbery, then Minister of State for International Trade, currently the UK ambassador to Cuba, told Parliament: 'The EU and UK have already passed legislation...that makes it illegal to comply with the extraterritorial effects of the embargo. We will continue to work together with our EU partners to provide UK companies with the support they need to be able to trade with Cuba.'

19) Rock Around the Blockade continues to campaign in Britain in solidarity with socialist Cuba and upholds the example that Cuba sets around the world. We will continue to participate in the 1cent4Cuba campaign to expose and challenge the extra-territorial application of the US blockade.