



Ottawa-Cuba Connections

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Contribution of Ottawa-Cuba Connections to the Universal Periodical Review on Cuba

Cuba's social and economic progress, including its capacity to overcome natural disasters and pandemics such as COVID-19, are inextricably linked to the U.S. blockade against the island, which has been described as the most comprehensive, complex, and prolonged system of unilateral coercive measures ever imposed against any country in history. Still today, Cuba asserts that the blockade is the main obstacle to its development in all fields of endeavour. It points out that during 2020 and up to September 2021, the Cuban economy lost 13% of its GDP due to the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world economic crisis and the unprecedented intensification of the economic, commercial, and financial blockade. This situation has proven to be devastating for all fields of the economy with direct consequences on people's lives.

In the past four years, Cuba has had more than its share of tragedies and natural catastrophes, including Hurricane Ian, which hit the island on September 26, 2022, and is considered by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to be one of the worst hurricanes to hit the area in a century. 8,500 hectares of cropland were hit by flooding, with the banana crop most impacted, and 5,000 tobacco farms were destroyed. The long-term impact of Hurricane Ian is estimated at over \$1 billion in damages. Because of the care the Cuban government takes towards the well-being of its people, very little lives were lost, but Cuba's aim, as always, is that no one be left behind. According to the WMO, Cuba is one of the world leaders in terms of hurricane preparedness and disaster management. The

day before Hurricane Ian hit, 50,000 people were evacuated and taken to 55 shelters. Less than five days after landfall, 82% of the residents of Havana had their power restored.

With regards to this natural disaster, it is worth recalling that Cuba is a member of the Small Island Developing States. At the UN General Assembly in September 2021, ahead of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, these nations clearly stated that their islands, threatened by rising sea levels and unprecedented natural disasters, were facing an existential threat if rich countries failed to make good on their promises to turn the tide on global warming. They stated that official development assistance to help cover the cost of rebuilding after every tropical cyclone and adapting to increasing sea levels should be viewed as a form of reparations for past environmental damage, for which rich countries are mainly responsible. Cuba has pointed out that, to this end, in March 2021, its representatives made a proposal at the 28th meeting of the Green Climate Fund for the funding of the “Mi Costa” coastal protection project, which was approved by a majority of votes, while only the U.S. opposed it. This is but one example of how Cuba’s efforts for advancement at all levels is being hindered by the U.S., mainly, but not exclusively, through its blockade against Cuba. In Cuba’s report on the necessity of ending the blockade imposed by the U.S. against Cuba - Report on Resolution 75/289 of the United Nations General Assembly - it is pointed out: “During this period, the economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba has remained the backbone of U.S. policy towards Cuba, and has been opportunistically intensified at unprecedented levels in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The intensification of this policy and the economic strangulation against Cuba, in the midst of the pandemic, have been accompanied by an increase in political, media and communications aggression, and an unprecedented increase in disinformation operations, hugely financed with federal funds from the U.S. budget. In open violation of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, this conduct is aimed at fabricating a political opposition, even at the cost of generating disorder and instability, fracturing the constitutional order and social consensus, encouraging irregular migration, and damaging the conditions of peace and security in which the Cuban people live.”

It must also be mentioned that, in the face of such infringements on peace and security, Cuba has taken initiatives to ensure the peace and stability, not only of Cuba, but of the Latin-American and Caribbean region. One such initiative is the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace adopted in 2014 by the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States, made up of 33 countries. The declaration, based on the principles and rules of international law, affirms that signatories will solve disputes through peaceful means with the aim of uprooting forever the threat or use of force in the region. It reasserts their commitment not to intervene, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other State and to observe the principles of national sovereignty, equal rights and self-determination of peoples. It pledges to foster cooperation and friendly relations among themselves and with other nations irrespective of differences in their political, economic, and social systems or development levels as well as to fully respect the inalienable right of every State to choose its political, economic, social, and cultural system, as an essential condition to ensure peaceful coexistence among nations.

In light of the fact that we can only conclude that the U.S. blockade is the main obstacle to Cuba's development, as it basically deprives an entire people of the right to peace, well-being, and human progress; and in light of the fact that Cuba's report to the UN is the basis on which, for the 30th year, 185 member States voted in favour of the resolution to end the blockade, while only two opposed it; and in the same spirit of overwhelming worldwide condemnation of the blockade and its violation of the human rights of the Cuban people: we invite the United Nations Human Rights Office to prioritize finding solutions to the plight of Cuba in the face of the blockade, and take into consideration how such a decision, taken against the blockade by the overwhelming majority of the international community, can be implemented.

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