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To the Human Rights Council of the United Nations

for the Human Rights Universal Periodic Review (Fourth) concerning the Republic of Cuba

The Federation of Women of Greece (OGE) is a militant women's organization. It deals with all aspects of women's inequality and it struggles against the exploitation and oppression of women of the popular families. It was founded in 1976 and its members are hundreds of Women's Associations and Branches all over Greece. It brings together the working women and the unemployed, the self-employed women, the poor farmers, the young mothers in order to claim all they deserve and all they can have nowadays according to the achievements of science and technology. The Federation of Women of Greece stands in solidarity with the peoples and the women who have suffered and still suffer from the attacks of every imperialist organization.

The Federation of Women of Greece has declared war against the imperialists who spread wars, poverty and refugees. Its participation and activity in the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and as its Coordinator for Europe since 2007 serves this goal.

A delegation of the Federation of Women of Greece(OGE) attended the Celebration of the 70 Years of WIDF that took place in Havana, Cuba in December 2015. Additionally a delegation of OGE participated in WIDF secretariat meeting in Havana in December 2018. We were impressed by the fact that despite the difficulties that the USA have caused to the people of Cuba by the inhuman blockade, the Cuban people have achieved a high level of social equality. The high progress in gender equality, education and healthcare, as well as the significant protection of children with severe concern for the children with special needs are highly respected. Moreover, the fact that Cuba, despite the many problems caused by the US blockade, gives medical assistance in many countries (as during the COVID-19) all over the world shows the Cubans' true solidarity. They deserve our admiration and respect.

1. Human Rights and women's rights in Cuba

Cuba drafted and adopted a new Constitution in 2019. The new Constitution of the Republic of Cuba was the result of extensive discussion with the people. Millions of workers, young people, women, retirees, etc. took part in the formation of the Constitution with their opinion and their proposals without any kind of exclusion. The new Constitution of Cuba was put to a referendum and was approved by 90.61% of valid votes, i.e. by 6,816,169 Cuban citizens, while a total of 7,848,343, i.e. 84.4% of adult Cuban citizens, took part in the process. The very process for the formulation and approval of the Constitution is proof of the high level of democratic institutions in Cuba, the broad participation of the people in political and social life that makes them essentially sovereign and responsible for the developments in their country.

In the new Constitution of Cuba, all human rights are guaranteed to a high degree, while these are not treated only as individual rights, but as social rights that arise as an obligation of the state of the Republic of Cuba and must be fulfilled to a higher degree every time. Some of the fundamental provisions of the Cuban Constitution on human rights, **which are directly connected to women's equality** are as follows:

ARTICLE 1. Cuba is a socialist state based on the rule of law and social justice, democratic, independent and sovereign, organized including all and for the good of all as a single and indivisible democracy, based on work, dignity, humanity and ethics of its citizens for the enjoyment of freedom, equality, solidarity, individual and collective well-being.

ARTICLE 16 defends and protects the enjoyment of human rights and rejects any manifestation of racism or discrimination.

ARTICLE 41. The State of Cuba recognizes and guarantees the unlimited, inalienable, indivisible, universal and interdependent enjoyment and exercise of human rights, in accordance with the principles of progressivity, equality and non-discrimination. All persons are equal before the law, enjoy the same protection and treatment by the authorities and enjoy the same rights, freedoms and opportunities, without any discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ethnic origin, skin color, religious beliefs, disability, national or territorial origin or any other personal condition or circumstance that entails discrimination that affects human dignity. (...)

ARTICLE 43. Women and men have equal rights and obligations in the economic, political, cultural, work, social, family and every other field. The state guarantees that the same opportunities and possibilities are offered to both women and men. It ensures the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights, protects them from gender-based violence in all its forms

and spaces, and creates the means to ensure their full participation in society.

ARTICLE 46 All persons have the right to life, physical and moral integrity, liberty, justice, security, peace, health, education, culture, recreation, sports and their integral development.

ARTICLE 56. The state recognizes the right of assembly, demonstration and association for lawful and peaceful purposes, provided that they are exercised with respect for public order and in accordance with the provisions of the law.

ARTICLE 64. The right to work is recognized. A person who is able to work has the right to obtain decent employment, according to their choice, their qualifications, their abilities and the demands of the economy and society.

ARTICLE 72. Public health is a right of all individuals and it is the responsibility of the state to guarantee access, free and quality care, protection and rehabilitation services.

ARTICLE 73. Education is the right of all individuals and the responsibility of the state, which guarantees free, affordable and quality education services for comprehensive training, from early childhood to postgraduate university education.

1.1 The effects of the blockade of Cuba on human rights

The main obstacle facing Cuba in expanding its people's conquests and promoting human rights is the long-standing unjust imperialist embargo by the US and other allied nations since 1961. Based on official figures filed by the government of Cuba to the UN, the total losses to its economy in these decades amount to over 138 billion dollars in current prices. In 2017 the Trump administration in the US further tightened the embargo by adopting 243 additional measures which today the Biden administration keeps in place. The brutality of the blockade measures became even more evident during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the US and its allies did not hesitate to block the import of basic necessities, food items necessary for children, even medical equipment, medical supplies and medicines that were necessary to deal with the pandemic and save human lives.

The measures to block Cuba are a flagrant violation of the UN Charter of Human Rights and have been condemned 30 times by the UN General Assembly, with the latest on November 2, 2022. In total, 185 UN states with their votes supported the request for immediate lifting of the measures of the blockade of Cuba by the USA.

2. Gender equality and empowerment of women.

- In Cuba, various advances have taken place in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment. These advances are connected to the progress which has been achieved in the country in several sectors of social life, such as in health, education and welfare.

2.1 Healthcare

Cuba's health system is universally recognized, to which all its citizens have free access. Cuba, by decision of its National Assembly, in 2022 spent 23% of the state budget on Health, a percentage that is one of the highest in the world. Vaccine coverage remains at 99% and since 2015

Cuba was the first country to eliminate mother-to-fetus transmission of HIV/AIDS. At the end of 2022, Cuba achieved a preliminary infant mortality rate of 7.5 deaths per thousand live births. 39 fewer deaths were reported than in 2021, when the country reached a rate of 7.6.

Mortality from infectious diseases in Cuba, even during COVID-19, is less than 1%. Today, the Cuban population is vaccinated for free against 13 diseases with 11 vaccines, eight of which are produced domestically. Six diseases have been completely eliminated through vaccination programs.

The superiority of Cuba's health system became even more evident in the measures to reverse the pandemic. With its own resources and means, Cuba managed to produce 5 different vaccines against COVID-19 (Soberana 1, Soberana 2, Soberana Plus, Abdala, Mambisa). During this time, Cuba has administered more than 43 million doses of vaccines to its citizens. Today more than 10 million Cubans or 89% of the population are fully vaccinated with all the prescribed additional doses. The effectiveness of the vaccines and overall measures of the Cuban government led the country to record one of the lowest mortality rates internationally from the pandemic. Cuba currently records 8,530 deaths from COVID-19, while other countries such as ours, Greece, with similar population, records 36,283 deaths.

Despite the significant problems created by the US blockade, Cuba offers important medical assistance to many countries in the world. During the pandemic, the specialized medical brigade Henry Reeve offered its help in a total of 23 countries around the world. Since its establishment in 2005, it has provided free medical services in almost 30 cases after disasters and epidemics, while its contribution was particularly significant during the cholera epidemics in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and during the Ebola epidemic in 2014 in West Africa.

2.2 Education

The Cuban Government guarantees free, affordable and quality education services for comprehensive training, from early childhood to postgraduate university education.

Cuba is the only country in Latin America that has met UNESCO's Education for All 2000-2015 general goals set by the UN. Cuba has eliminated illiteracy and school attendance is 99.7%. Cuba, by decision of its National Assembly, in 2021 spent 24% of the state budget on Education, a percentage that is one of the highest in the world.

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 (GEM 2020 Report) highlighted the achievements of the Cuban government's education policies in ensuring inclusive and quality education and 100% pre-school coverage, as well as the flexibility of the Cuban education system that allows recognition of diversity and meeting the different needs of students.

Another recognition of Cuba's work in the field of education is that the island was among the 35 countries selected to compose the Atlas on the Right to Education for Girls and Women prepared by UNESCO with the aim of eliminating gender differences in education and ensuring access in equal conditions.

2.3 Labor rights

After the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the right to work has been essentially guaranteed to all who are able to work, according to their choice, their qualifications, their abilities and the demands of the economy and society. **All workers (men and women) have the right to rest, which is guaranteed by the 8-hour working day, weekly rest and paid annual leave.**

Among the achievements are the elimination of unemployment, high rates of female employment on equal terms, the protection of workers and guaranteed social security, as well as the development of formulas for the labor force participation and for the training of workers.

The prevention of child labor is of special significance in order to prevent the early abandonment of school by children and young women.

The State of Cuba promotes and facilitates the trade union action of workers and the participation of all workers in their unions. 97.2% of workers and pensioners are unionized.

2.4. Achievements on women's equality

UNESCO recognizes Cuba's undeniable achievements in terms of gender equality, especially those related to the inclusion of women in productive activities, the protection of sexual and

reproductive rights, and universal and free education for girls and boys, as highlighted in April 2022 by the representatives of the Regional Office of Culture of the Organization for Latin America and the Caribbean, the National Commission of Cuba for the UNESCO (CNCU) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Among the achievements concerning the status of Cuban women are: equal pay with men for equal work, the right to a widow's pension, to land and to bank loans, paid maternity leave and its attendant benefits for the working woman before birth and until the baby is one year old, access to universal and free education and respect for their sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to abortion and the free and responsible choice of childbearing.

Cuba was the first country to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination against women.

2.5 Data on the participation of women in the social life in Cuba.

The participation of women in decision-making is growing. They represented 51.5% in State and Government positions at the end of the first quarter of 2021.

Today in Cuba 53.22% of parliamentarians are women, rendering it the second parliament in the world with the largest female participation. Women represent 52.3% of the members of the Council of State. 8 are ministers and 30 vice ministers, for 48.5%. In the Council of Ministers, of the 34 members, 8 are women for 23.5%. Of 23 first deputy minister posts, 10 are held by women, for 43.5%. Of the elected governors and lieutenant governors, 53.3% are women.

Of the 4,487 professional union leaders in the country, 63% are women, which represents an increase of 14% since 2012. They also represent 63.3% of provincial and municipal leaders.

2.6 Special measures for gender equality

Cuba has a National Program for the Advancement of Women (PAM), a document conceived as the Agenda of the Cuban State in this respect and integrates in a single text actions and measures that correspond to the postulates and principles of the Constitution of Cuba, as well as with the international commitments contracted on gender equality.

The PAM promotes actions aimed at achieving greater comprehensiveness and effectiveness in the prevention and elimination of manifestations of discrimination against women, as well as strengthening the mechanisms and professional capacity of public officials to incorporate gender issues in the development of policies, programs and in the provision of services.

In 2021, the "Comprehensive strategy for the prevention and care of gender-based violence and in the family setting" was approved.

In December 2021, Decree Law 56/2021 "On the maternity of the worker and the responsibility of families" was published in the Official Gazette, with broad recognition of the social role of maternity, the incorporation and reincorporation of women to work.

With the entry into force of the new Criminal Code, gender and family violence and all forms of discrimination are confronted by Criminal Law.

2.7. The rights of children and adolescents.

The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba ensures the special protection of the State, society and families to the girls, boys and adolescents, taking into account their best interest in the decisions and acts that concern them.

The blockade makes it difficult to provide health, education and social assistance services, particularly affecting girls, boys and adolescents. Despite this, the country is at the forefront and shows levels comparable to those of developed countries in this area.

Violence against children and adolescents is recognized as family violence and as a case for urgent judicial protection.

2.8. Protection of the disabled

The Cuban State creates the conditions required for their rehabilitation or the improvement of their quality of life, their personal autonomy, their inclusion and social participation.

The educational centers, from primary studies to the University, serve students with disabilities, and provide them with reasonable adjustments in accordance with their needs and possibilities.

Since 1961, Cuba has recorded significant strides in the education and protection of children with special needs. Despite the enormous problems caused by the blockade imposed by the USA in education, approximately 2,030 to 2,050 students graduate from the 360 special schools each year. A significant number continue to the University, while jobs are guaranteed for all the disabled by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. At the same time, a serious effort is made towards their social integration, which is also reflected in the significant number of medals in the Paralympic Games: A total of 91 medals, 43 gold, 20 silver and 28 bronze, in 8 events.