

# Revolution and Rights

## Analysis of Report Cuba Presented to the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

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### *Racism*

For more than half a century, Cuba's leadership has unsuccessfully tried to hide the truth about racial discrimination in Cuba. During this very same time, activists and scholars of the race problem have managed to keep the issue from being forgotten. In spite of this, the regime has felt obligated to make only lukewarm pronouncements on the subject. After much fuss and embarrassment, the Cuban government presented a report to the Committee for the Elimination of Racism (CEDR) at its 78th session, celebrated on February 14th and March 11th of this year.

There are aspects of this report that the Committee believes to be positive, but it truly reveals the Cuban government's lack of cooperation with respect to the rights of African descendents. Each one of the commissions, coordinating groups, and foundations mentioned in this report are quite far from reality. They are entirely elitist, official and consequently discriminatory in nature.

Under no circumstances have independent organizations devoted to the race problem in Cuba, such as the *Citezens' Committee for Racial Integration*, the *Juan Gualberto Gómez Movement for Racial Integration*, and the *Rosa Parks Feminist Movement*, been called upon to work with these official institutions. They are not even permitted to have working meetings.

Activities programmed by non-governmental organizations for dealing with the race problem are boycotted and violently repressed

by the political police. The mechanisms used to maintain the government's monopoly on the subject include arrests, physical and verbal aggression, limiting freedom of movement, and slanderous campaigns.

Cuban law does not consider racial discrimination a sanctionable crime.\* On the contrary, there are far too many cases in which skin color seems to determine the severity of the punishment, as in the case of three young black men who were summarily executed simply for having tried to leave the country.\*\* Decree 217 (April 22, 1997) of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers restricts the access of Cuban citizens from the eastern provinces to Havana, forcing them to return to the places of origin. It is important to note that the immense majority of the inhabitants of the Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba provinces are blacks or *mestizos* who need to emigrate to the capital precisely due to the extreme poverty of those places. This decree should be abolished from Cuban law because it is unconstitutional.

If we are to eradicate this racist scourge from our society, which is of supreme importance, it is extremely crucial to create an ombudsman or an independent organ devoted to following, supervising, and evaluating the progress made in the struggle against racism and race discrimination. We must also be able to identify ethnic or racial discrimination in all its manifestations.

It is equally important to create affirmative action measures, to guarantee proportional representation to African descendents in dif-

ferent social sectors—education, the economy, industry, public and business positions.

The reason the truth about racism in Cuba is hidden is primarily due to the regime's obsession with protecting its own image at any cost, and the intrinsic inability of its undemocratic system, which attempts to solve social problems from within a power center that is isolated from its citizens and surrounded by obedient and useless institutions and functionaries.

As far as the state's economic sector is concerned, only about 35% of the leadership positions are held by blacks and *mestizos*.

Eighty percent of the prison population in Cuba is black.

The proportion of blacks and *mestizos* in the Politburo (17%) and the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee's Secretariat (4%) is as low as that of the proportion in the Council of Ministers (8%) and the highest levels of the Armed Forces (10%).

As far as representative bodies are concerned, the proportion is nearly constant: State Council (35%), National Assembly (36%), and Provincial Assemblies (35%).

In and of themselves, these data reveal that racial prejudice in Cuba are true manifestations of racism. Far from being limited to "relations involving couples or more intimate areas of life," as the Cuban government's report says, they are deeply rooted in our society, and impact not only the black and *mestizo* population primarily, but also our entire political, economic, and social life as a nation.

Sweeping the dust under the rug does not make for a cleaner home; it only hides it

from visitors. The Cuban government knows it has dust hidden away, even if it has hidden it under the carpet of sovereignty and national independence.

### *Migration*

The restrictions on the right of Cubans to travel abroad and return is something they not only let the whole world know, but also argue that these absurd migratory measures are necessary. It is not really known why, but everything seems to point to a policy of punishment for citizens who dare to want to freely leave their Marxist paradise, as is so common everywhere else in the world. Cubans who emigrate are also objects of discrimination.

The white card, or exit permit, payment for the right to return home or remain, and the prohibited entry of Cuban citizens who have been declared *personae non gratae* has caused many Cubans great suffering, humiliation, and death. Such is the case of Caridad Bidondo, who committed suicide on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, after all her efforts and begging so that her daughter might return to Cuba and rejoin her family failed.

The Cuban government is not going to abide by the CEDR's recommendations, or ratify the Civil, Political and Economic Rights Pacts, or modify its Penal code or immigration laws either. If it did these things, it would have to stop being tyrannical, something in which it is not interested. Instead, it prefers an apocalyptic kind of change.

#### Editor's notes:

\* The (1987) Penal Code establishes not only the Crime of Apartheid (Article 120), but also that racial discrimination falls under the category of Crime against Equal Rights (Article 295).

\*\* The three men who were executed (Lorenzo Enrique Copello Castillo, Bárbaro Leodán Sevilla García, and Jorge Luis Martínez Isaac) were the principal perpetrators of the bloodless but forced hijacking of the Baraguá launch in the bay of Havana, on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003. The remaining hijackers, including other African descendents, were sentenced to long prison terms.