

Granma

European brigade members express support for the Cuban Revolution

The work of a loyal friend recognized

Nuria Barbosa León
Photos: Karoly Emerson/ICAP

• THE 47th European José Martí voluntary work and Cuba solidarity brigade, composed of over 75 individuals from some 10 countries, is bringing a message of support for the Cuban Revolution, as participants learn and become more familiar with the island's people, during their stay in the country.

Based at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, in the province of Artemisa, the group is undertaking activities July 3-21; including voluntary agricultural work, visits to sites of historic interest, communities, schools and institutions in the provinces of Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, and La Habana.

Brigadistas will also attend conferences by Cuban experts on the life and work of José Martí; the island's economy and the updating process currently underway; its political system and participative democracy; as well as the damage caused by the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on the Cuban people by the United States; the political thought of Ernesto Che Guevara, and other relevant issues.

Two participants, Juan Guirau and Schneider Benedet from France – both members of the Marseille branch of the Cuba-France Friendship Association - spoke with **Granma International**.

This is Guirau's fifth visit to Cuba with the brigade, while it is Benedet first. Both talked about the work of their organization and its efforts in the struggle against aggressive and interventionist policies toward the island by successive U.S. governments. They also highlighted actions undertaken by the Association to disseminate information about the island's reality, in order to combat anti-Cuban media campaigns waged by the traditional press in their country.

Meanwhile, their comrade Kasper Libeert from Belgium and representing the Cuba-Socialist solidarity movement, explained that his organization is preparing a day of tributes in September, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assassination of heroic guerrilla Ernesto Che Guevara in Bolivia.

"We're going to have a huge festival," stated the Belgian. "We are inviting Cuban intellectuals and artists, Aleida Guevara (Che's daughter), Harry "Pombo" Villegas who fought alongside Che in Bolivia. There will also be peace activists from the U.S. and a delegation from the Cuban Institute of



Members of the 47th European José Martí voluntary work and Cuba solidarity brigade, condemned the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on the island.

Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP)."

The group is planning a two-day event in Brussels in November, where participants will visit Parliament to explain to members the negative impact of the U.S. blockade on the Cuban people, and call on them to publically denounce the genocidal and unjust policy.

"Our organization opposes the occupation of the Guantánamo territory, where an illegal U.S. military base is located," stated the young activist, noting that this is one of many issues addressed by the group through their Cuba solidarity work.

Recently the organization has denounced the step-back in the process of rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba, initiated under former President Barack Obama, following a change in the country's policy toward the island announced in June by current President Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, retired university professor Luisa Carvalho, representing the Portugal-Cuba Friendship Association, chose to join the brigade in order to contribute, in some way, to the construction of socialism and at the same time get to know more about the island and its people.

"I've read information that circulates about Cuba in Europe.



The brigade is composed of individuals of all ages from various European countries.

There are two different positions on the subject: that disseminated by leftist parties and organizations with articles defending the Revolution; while right wing groups exploit any negative detail to totally condemn and slander the social construction of the country. We must be ready to refute this kind of information which is being circulated around the world," she added.

Spanish sisters Rosalía and Luzía Mendez Senra agree. The two brigadistas, perhaps the youngest members of the group: the former 18 years of age and about to start university, and the latter a 16 year old high school student, are visiting the island to meet and talk with the Cuban people, experiences which they will report back to their friends and classmates.

"Over there they spread a lot of lies about Cuba and we want to see what it's really like," noted the young women.

During the welcoming ceremony, ICAP First Vice President Elio Gámez, thanked those present for their personal sacrifice and work to support the Revolution from their countries of origin, and for deciding to visit the island as part of a solidarity brigade. "Cuba is proud of its friends and solidarity around the world which has stood the test of time," he stated. •

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• CANADIAN journalist and sociologist Arnold August was presented, in Havana, with the Friendship Medal awarded by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba; an honor which he dedicated to the memory of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz.

Gerardo Hernández, decorated Hero of the Republic of Cuba, presented the distinction to the outstanding intellectual, who described Fidel as a "source of inspiration for the world in the struggle for social justice, sovereignty and peace."

Speaking with **Granma International** at the headquarters of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) in Havana, the Canadian journalist reiterated the need to highlight the ways in which Cuban revolutionaries are struggling against cultural aggression promoted by Western countries, above all the United States.

According to August, the core of this anti-Cuban media campaign is based around the concept of democracy, with the U.S. presenting itself as its global champion. On the island, meanwhile, this concept is understood as a form of participatory governance, in which the people make decisions.

I dedicate my struggle to combating false propaganda against Cuba, sponsored by imperial governments and capitalist mass media, he noted, whilst going on to stress the importance of making people in other parts of the world



Gerardo Hernández, decorated Hero of the Republic of Cuba, presents Canadian journalist, Arnold August, with the Friendship Medal.

aware of actions being taken by the island to resist such aggression.

It is for this reason that August has dedicated his life to conducting research, with over 70 articles already published on social networks. He is also the author of various books, including **Democracy in Cuba 1997-1998**, **Cuba and its**

Neighbors: Democracy in Motion, and **Cuba-U.S. Relations: Obama and Beyond**; and has recently edited the work **The End of Ideology in Cuba?**, which will be presented at next year's Havana International Book Fair.

August has been a loyal defender of the island and its people ever since his early affiliation with the "Carrefour de l'Amitié" Cuba solidarity organization, which later became the "Quebec-Cuba Solidarity Network," until it was changed to its present format: "The Round Table Coordinating Committee of Quebec-Cuba Solidarity."

The activist is currently a member of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and the Caracas-based Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity. He is also a collaborator for multinational television broadcaster **teleSUR**, and websites **Cubadebate** and **Cubaperiodistas**, as well as other media outlets from Spain, Chile and Ecuador.

Arnold August also founded the "Fabio Di Celmo" Committee for the Freedom for the Cuban Five in Quebec, and headed a delegation from the Canadian province to the First Cuba-Canada Encounter and Second International Solidarity with Cuba Encounter, both held in Havana. Such efforts saw August receive the Félix Elmuza Medal, the highest distinction awarded by the Union of Journalists of Cuba (UPEC).

The Canadian sociologist also explained how ideas emerged for his work during two conversations with Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz regarding his research.

He also demanded an end to the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba, and noted that he will continue to defend socialist Cuba against cultural aggression. •

ORLANDO PERERA/ICAP