

# Granma



## **Cuba surpasses 2017 tourist arrival estimates**

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Beach resorts are one of the most popular modalities in Cuba.

The country has received four million visitors thus far this year

Yisel Martínez García

• CUBA has received four million inter-national visitors thus far this 2017, and is set to end the year with 4.7 million. These figures represent clients and tour operators' confidence in Cuba as a safe and healthy destination, according to Ivis Fernández, Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) representative in Matanzas. The four millionth tourist arrived to Varadero's Juan Gualberto Gómez International Airport on November 6, two months before the same figure was reached in 2016. "I have visited five times and I love Cuba, above all its cities. I also like the fact that it's safe and peaceful," stated French visitor Antonio on arrival to the island. "For us at the airport, it's an honor that clients choose to spend their vacations in the

province of Matanzas, and of course in the Varadero resort," stated María Elena Oviedo, head of the Juan Gualberto Gómez airport's business department. "Varadero has shown its ability to recover following recent weather events which severely affected the country's northern zone. Since Hurricane Irma, the number of travelers to this tourist resort has gradually grown, averaging at about 20,000 clients a day," Ivis Fernández added. Work is currently underway to prepare for the start of the upcoming 2017-2018 winter season, with an estimated 1.6 million visitors expected to visit the resort by the end of the year. "We have worked to try and prepare the country for the high season, and will be ready to meet the demands of the expected growth

when the period begins on November 15. Today, all the facilities affected by Irma have been restored and we are working on others which are key to the development of this tourist destination. "These include an international hotel, groundworks on a plot of land called the Oasis, where two new big hotels will be built, and the opening, at the end of this year, of a brewery, which will be one of our most attractive and novel offers for clients who decide to choose to visit a destination like Varadero," explained, the Mintur representative in Matanzas. Meanwhile, the Varadero International Airport has been undergoing repair and refurbishment works since May in preparation for the winter season; with paint-works, maintenance, restoration and repairs

undertaken across the entire terminal, stated the head of its business department, María Elena Oviedo. The airport, which opened in 1989, receives an average of half a million passengers every year, while its efficient and high quality service, means that it only takes around 18-25 minutes between visitors landing and leaving the airport. Although Canada continues to be the main emissary market of tourists to Varadero, Cuba's most important beach resort, significant growth has also been seen among the German, French, British, Russian, Spanish, and Italian markets. There are currently 67,769 hotel rooms in Cuba, a figure which should increase to 68,200 by the end of this year, with plans to build 100,000 more by 2030. •

Raúl receives senior  
Communist Party of  
Vietnam official

Speech by Foreign  
Minister Bruno Rodríguez  
at the United Nations

Foreign investment  
opportunities  
in Cuba

Firearm  
democracy in  
the United States

# Raúl receives senior official of the Communist Party of Vietnam

• ON the afternoon of November 6, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee, received compañero Vo Van Thoung, a member of the Political Bureau and Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Secretariat and president of its Propaganda and Education Committee, on an official visit to the island.

During the meeting, the two officials discussed the excellent state of relations which unite the two peoples, parties and governments, and their willingness to continue strengthening these.

Participating on the Vietnamese side were compañeros Nguyen Trung Thanh, the country's ambassador in Havana; Nguyen Tuan Phong, vice president of the department of Foreign Affairs of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee; and Phan Hai, the department's director general for the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

Also in attendance were José Ramón Machado Ventura, second secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPP) Central Committee, and Jorge Arias, deputy director of the CPP International Relations Department. •



## Elections corresponding to our times

*por Cuba*  
Elección de delegados municipales  
26 noviembre 2017

*Votar por el mejor, por su capacidad  
y fidelidad al pueblo.*

Jesús Jank Curbelo

• ON November 26, the municipal assembly elections will see a strong turnout from our people, especially since the day is preceded by the first anniversary of the death of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, the greatest architect of the Cuban electoral system.

This, according to Alina Balseiro Gutiérrez, president of the National Electoral Commission (CEN), during a press conference to detail the steps underway as part of the general election process across the country, and the following measures to be implemented once the results of the nomination process for candidates to delegates of Municipal Assemblies of People's Power (AMPP) are known.

In this sense, Balseiro stressed that since November 1st, photos and biographies of the candidates nominated in each of the municipalities of the country have been displayed, while electoral training processes will continue through November 17.

She noted that following the first round of elections for municipal assembly delegates on November 26, a second round will take place December 3 in those constituencies where no candidate receives more than 50% of the valid votes cast. The AMPPs will be constituted 21 days following the election of all delegates.

Regarding the conclusion of the nomination process, the CEN president highlighted the enthusiasm and commitment with which people attended constituency assemblies, despite the destruction caused by Hurricane Irma, while she described the results obtained as favorable, adequate and corresponding to our times.

Moreover, she emphasized a number of points that voters should bear in mind on the day of the vote, most notably the need to know the location of the polling station where they can exercise their right to the vote, as well as verifying their details on the electoral register, which will be displayed in visible and highly frequented places in each community. •

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
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**EDITOR**  
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**NEWSROOM EDITOR**  
Juan Diego Nusa Peñalver

**NEWSROOM & ADMINISTRATION**  
Avenida General Suárez y Territorial  
Plaza de la Revolución "José Martí",  
Apartado Postal 6260,  
La Habana 6, Cuba. C.P. 10699  
Tel.: (53-7) 881-6265 / 881-7443  
Switchboard: 881-3333 Exts 119 / 176  
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**Granma**  
**INTERNATIONAL**

**WEBSITE INTERNET**  
<http://www.granma.cu>

**E-MAIL**  
[informacion@granma.cu](mailto:informacion@granma.cu)

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**BRAZIL**  
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**SPANISH**  
Inés Miriam Alemán Aroche  
Tel: 881-6265

**ENGLISH**  
Marie Chase  
Tel: 881-1679

**FRENCH**  
Frédéric Woungly-Massaga  
Tel: 881-6054

**PORTUGUESE**  
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Ute Michael  
Tel: 881-1679

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Tel: 832- 5337 / 881- 6265

**CIRCULATION AND SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
Omar Quevedo Acosta  
Tel: 881-9821

# "We will persevere, with the consensus of our people and especially the patriotic commitment of the youngest Cubans, in the anti-imperialist struggle and in defense of our independence"

Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, on the "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba," in United Nations headquarters, New York, November 1, 2017.

(Council of State transcript / GI translation)

• Mr. President;  
Your Excellencies permanent representatives;  
Distinguished delegates;  
U.S. citizens and Cubans resident in the United States who are present in this hall:  
I would like to express to the people and government of the United States; Mayor Bill De Blasio; Governor Andrew Cuomo; and other authorities in New York; as well as its citizens and especially families of the victims, our most heartfelt condolences, in the name of the Cuban people and government, for the terrorist attack which occurred yesterday afternoon.  
I also express our sincere condolences to the peoples and government of Argentina and Belgium.

Mr. President:  
I express the most energetic condemnation of the disrespectful, offensive, and interventionist statements made by the United States Ambassador to the United Nations against Cuba and against the Cuban government, a few minutes ago.  
I recall that the United States, where flagrant violations of human rights are committed, of deep concern to the international community, does not have the slightest moral authority to criticize Cuba, a small, solidary country, with an extensive, recognized international record; an honorable, hard-working, and friendly people.  
She spoke in the name of the head of an empire that is responsible for most of the wars in progress on the planet today, and which murders innocent people, and is the decisive factor in instability worldwide and the very serious threats to peace and international security, trampling international law and the United Nations Charter, which she has just cynically evoked.  
It has not been 55 years, Madam Ambassador, you erred in your first sentence; it has been 26 of these sessions, and more than half a century since the events being discussed today originated.  
She lies, uses the same style that predominates in U.S. politics today. This all began before the Cuban nation even existed. When the Cuban people, for the first time rose up in arms in 1868, the appetite for annexation and domination, of what was and is today U.S. imperialism, had already been unleashed.  
In 1898, using a pretext - as is characteristic of the modern history of the United States: the explosion of the ship, the Maine, in a Cuban port, they entered as allies of Cuban independence forces and then occupied the country as invaders, and imposed the Platt Amend-



Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez.

ment, cutting short the independence and sovereignty of Cuba; they conducted three military occupations, imposed 60 years of total domination that ended January 1, 1959, with the entry of the Rebel Army to Havana and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, that continues to this day carrying on the same struggles that have inspired our people for over 100 years. (Applause)  
She lies, she used a phrase, attributing a statement on the so-called October or Missile Crisis to a supposedly Cuban source. I invite her to state the source, to state its author, to present evidence. It sounds like one of the tweets proliferating in this country, in these times of hate, division, and dirty politics. (Applause)  
When the Cuban Revolution triumphed, the United States set regime change as its objective. The policy announced by President Trump on June 16 is not new; it is the same policy, it is an old policy anchored in the past.  
She mentioned the illustrious U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson. She forgot to say that he was the person who, deceived by his own government, had the unfortunate duty during a session of the Security Council, to show photos of supposed Cuban aircraft, actually of U.S. origin, bearing the emblem of the Cuban Air Force, that on April 15 bombed the city of Havana, caused numerous casualties, and was the prelude to the attack, the invasion, at Playa Girón or the Bay of Pigs.  
These bombings and the involuntary lie of Ambassador Stevenson, who had been deceived by his government, occurred even before the declaration of the social-

ist character of the Cuban Revolution. These bombings took place prior to the declaration of the socialist character of our Revolution.  
She has spoken of the October Crisis.  
She has spoken of the days of President Kennedy's assassination, and the declassification of documents. They have really been hidden from the U.S. people too long. Declassify them all.  
But if she wants to talk about these issues, I suggest she read the book  
Trained to Kill: The Inside Story of CIA Plots against Castro, Kennedy, and Che, by CIA agent Veciana, in which he recounts his meeting with CIA agent David Phillips and with Lee Harvey Oswald, in Dallas, during the third week of September, 1963.  
It has been a history of lies and aggression: Operation Northwoods, Operation Mongoose. Information was just declassified showing that at that time the United States had prepared 261,000 soldiers, ready for a direct invasion of Cuba. Functioning in Florida was the CIA's largest base in history, until that time, with more than 700 agents, until the creation of the even bigger CIA base in Saigon.  
She uses a style reminiscent of the trial of Alice in Wonderland: sentence first, trial later.  
I speak for my people, and I also speak for those who cannot call President Trump or the U.S. Ambassador by their name, but feel and think like me.  
At least she has recognized the total isolation of the United States in this hall and in the world. You are alone on the issue of the blockade of Cuba! (Applause)  
She ignores the power of the truth,

underestimates the strength of an idea at the bottom of a cave, which is more powerful than an army, as José Martí said, who wrote, carrying it on his chest, in an unfinished letter with the following phrase: "Everyday I am in danger of giving my life for my country, for my duty... to prevent in time, with the independence of Cuba, that the United States extends itself into the Antilles and falls, with this added strength, upon the lands of our America."  
Ambassador, everything began much more than 26 years ago, much more than 55 years ago. Along with the military aggression, the fabrication of pretexts, plans for a direct invasion, measures taken to strangle our economy, state terrorism, destabilization, and subversion, they proposed - and I quote the infamous letter by Undersecretary of State Lester Mallory, signed April 6, 1960 - promoting "... disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship... all possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba ... denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages..." The blockade of Cuba was created "to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."  
Nonetheless, when President Raúl Castro Ruz and President Barack Obama made those surprising, hopeful announcements, December 17, 2014, President Obama described the blockade as failed and obsolete, ineffective in achieving its objectives, causing harm to the Cuban people and the isolation of the U.S. government. Later he described it as useless in advancing U.S. interests, failed, senseless, not viable, and a burden for

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citizens.

But the blockade was never recognized as a flagrant, massive, and systematic violation of the human rights of Cubans, which the United States Ambassador cynically omitted a few hours ago, nor was it recognized as inconsistent with international law or as an act of genocide, as defined by the Geneva Convention, nor was its goal of subjugating our people renounced.

Nonetheless, the President of the United States at that time repeatedly stated his intention to use his executive powers, and work with Congress, to lift the blockade.

A concrete reflection of this intention was the U.S. abstention, in 2016, during the vote on this resolution, which the United States Ambassador has just mocked.

During this period, substantive progress was made in terms of diplomatic relations, dialogue, and cooperation in areas of mutual interest and benefit; but during these last two years, the blockade was maintained, in all fundamental aspects, although some executive decisions were made to modify its implementation in a very limited fashion, but moving in a positive direction. The way in which the use of travel licenses was expanded was significant, given the legislative prohibition on travel to Cuba, that constitutes a violation of the rights and civil liberties of U.S. citizens, which she also failed to mention. Tangible results were also achieved in bilateral cooperation, to our mutual benefit, in such important arenas as confronting terrorism, drug trafficking, and digital crime.

Mr. President:

This past June 16, President Donald Trump proclaimed the blockade the fundamental axis of his anti-Cuban policy, and announced a series of measures meant to reinforce it.

In an antiquated, hostile anti-Cuban speech, reminiscent of the Cold War, and before an auditorium composed, among others, of rancid Batista henchmen, annexationists, and terrorists, the U.S. government returned to worn-out allegations of supposed human rights violations in Cuba to justify the tightening of the blockade. From this podium, heard this morning was his echo, his echo chamber.

President Trump does not have the slightest moral authority to question Cuba.

He leads a government of millionaires who intend to implement brutal measures against the poor and low income families of this country, minorities and immigrants. He follows a program which encourages hate and division, and promotes a dangerous idea of exceptionalism and supremacy disguised as patriotism, and which will lead to more violence. He ignores the will of voters: two thirds of U.S. citizens and Cuban residents in the United States, as well, support an end to the blockade.

Current U.S. policies harm citizens; corruption reigns in politics which have been hijacked by so-called special interests, that is, by the interests and the money of corporations: no support for education, health, or social security; restrictions on union organizing; and terrible gender-based discrimination.

Deserving of condemnation are the use of torture; police murders of African-Americans; civilian deaths caused by its troops; the indiscriminate, racially motivated death penalty; the murders, repression, and police surveillance of immigrants; the separation of families; the detention and deportation of minors; and the brutal measures threatening the children of undocumented immigrants who grew up and were educated in the United States.

This is the government that lost the



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popular vote.

The United States Ambassador has expressed her dream. I prefer to repeat that of Martin Luther King, when he said, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' Let freedom ring. (Applause)"

She has come to tell us that she recognizes that the future of the island rests in the hands of the Cuban people. She is telling an absolute lie. It was never this way, throughout history. It has been a history of domination and hegemony over Cuba.

The announced policy proposes turning back relations to a past of confrontation, to satisfy the spurious interests of extremist circles within the U.S. right and a frustrated, aging, minority of Cuban origin in Florida. The Presidential Memorandum establishing the policy toward Cuba includes, among other measures, new prohibitions on economic, commercial, and financial relations between U.S. companies and Cuban enterprises.

It additionally restricts the freedom of travel of U.S. citizens with the elimination of individual trips under the so-called category of "people-to-people" exchanges, and increased surveillance for the rest of visitors from that country.

In recent weeks, President Donald Trump has reiterated on four separate occasions, (including before this Assembly this past September), that his government will not lift the blockade on Cuba unless it makes changes to its internal order.

Today I reiterate that Cuba will never accept preconditions or impositions and we remind the President and his Ambassador that this approach, applied by a dozen of his predecessors, has never and will never work. It will be just one more example of a policy anchored in the past.

More recently, under the pretext of the health conditions of some diplomats in Havana, without the slightest evidence of their cause and origin - because they lie when they speak of attacks or incidents -

or the results of ongoing investigations, the government of the United States adopted new measures of a political nature against Cuba, which intensify the blockade and affect bilateral relations in their entirety.

Among them, it suspended the issue of visas for Cuban travelers and emigrants at its consulate in Havana, which undermines the right of citizens to travel freely and visit that country for short periods, as more than 163,000 Cubans have done this year, and seriously hinders the family reunification of others, under the bilateral agreement to grant no less than 20,000 immigrant visas per year. The requirement of an in-person interview with Cuban travelers in U.S. consulates in third countries, and with emigrants in the U.S. consular section in Bogotá, will greatly increase the cost of the procedure and make them unfeasible for a large number of them. Where are their rights in the United States' discourse?

There is no way to justify harming people and families to try to achieve political objectives against the constitutional order in Cuba.

The U.S. government, with the political purpose of limiting travel and damaging international tourism to Cuba, also issued an unfounded and utterly dishonest warning to U.S. citizens to avoid visiting our country.

Through the unjustified expulsion of personnel at our Consulate General in Washington, the only one in the United States, the capacity to provide services to U.S. travelers and especially to Cuban residents here, who have the absolute right to visit and interact normally with their nation, has been severely limited.

Equally, the U.S. arbitrarily and groundlessly reduced the personnel of our Embassy, which has caused, among other consequences, the dismantling of its Economic-Commercial Office, with the malicious political aim of eliminating dialogue with the U.S. business sector, genuinely interested in exploring existing business opportunities, even within the restrictive framework of blockade

regulations.

Nor is it surprising, considering what the Ambassador has said here, or her leaders previously, that the President of the United States ignores the unanimous international support for the progress that he is now reversing, or the similar demand for an immediate, total, and unconditional end to the blockade.

Mr. President:

As President Raúl Castro Ruz expressed, on July 14, "We reaffirm that any attempt to destroy the Revolution, whether through coercion and pressure, or the use of more subtle methods, will fail... Cuba is willing to continue discussing pending bilateral issues with the United States, on the basis of equality and respect for the sovereignty and independence of our country, and to continue respectful dialogue and cooperation in issues of common interest with the U.S. government."

"Cuba and the United States can cooperate and coexist, respecting our differences and promoting everything that benefits both countries and peoples, but it should not be expected that, in order to do so, Cuba will make concessions essential to its sovereignty and independence... nor will it negotiate its principles or accept conditions of any kind, just as we have never done throughout the history of the Revolution." End of quote. (Applause).

Mr. President:

Cuba presents today, for the 26th consecutive time before the United Nations General Assembly, the draft resolution (entitled) "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba."

In the current situation, this text acquires special relevance in the face of the setback that the actions of the new government of the United States against Cuba signal.

The blockade constitutes the greatest obstacle to the country's economic and social development and the implement-

ation of the National Plan, in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda. It is the main obstacle to the development of economic, commercial and financial relations between Cuba and the United States and the rest of the world.

According to calculations rigorously conducted by Cuban institutions, the blockade caused, in the year from April 2016 to April 2017, losses to the Cuban economy on the order of 4.305 billion dollars.

This figure is about double what would be needed as annual direct foreign investment for the Cuban economy to advance substantially toward development.

The accumulated damages reached the enormous figure of 822.280 billion dollars, calculated considering the devaluation of the U.S. dollar vis-à-vis the price of gold. At current prices, this is the equivalent of 130.178 billion dollars.

Dozens of banks in third countries have been affected in the last period by the extreme and tenacious persecution of Cuban financial transactions.

The blockade is contrary to International Law and its aggressively extraterritorial application damages the sovereignty of all states. It also harms economic and business interests in all latitudes.

Mr. President:

The Ambassador of the United States failed to mention that the blockade is a flagrant, massive, and systematic violation of the human rights of Cubans, and constitutes an act of genocide under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It is also an obstacle to the international cooperation that Cuba provides in humanitarian areas to 81 countries of the South.

The human damages caused by the application of this policy are incalculable. There is not a Cuban family or social service in Cuba that does not suffer the

deprivations and consequences of the blockade. Cuban émigrés also suffer discrimination and prejudices.

Over the last year, the Cuban importer and exporter of medical products, Medicuba S.A., made requests to purchase supplies from 18 U.S. companies that refused or never responded.

Others, such as the U.S. corporation Promega, recognized for the production of diagnostic kits to determine viral load in patients with HIV-AIDS, hepatitis C, or kidney diseases, refused in June 2017 to sell its products to Medicuba S.A., alleging that the Treasury Department maintains commercial sanctions that prohibit the sale of its products to the island.

On that same date, and with the same argument, the refusal to supply to Cuba was received from the company New England Biolabs Inc., which markets a wide range of enzymes, such as Proteinase K, which is a reagent that permits diagnosis of viral diseases such as dengue, Zika, and chikungunya, as well as other enzymes with multiple uses for the diagnosis of congenital malformations of fetuses, and to determine compatibility between organ donors and patients who are to undergo kidney, bone marrow, or liver transplants, among others.

Using the same argument, this company refused to provide supplies of a totally humanitarian nature to Cuba.

In April 2017, the German supplier Eckert & Ziegler Radiopharma GmbH, refused to supply to the same Cuban medical enterprise the Ge-68/Ga-68 Generator, or its components, which is a device used to diagnose prostate cancer. According to the company, it was not possible to directly supply the product to Cuba, or through a third country, because the blockade prevented it from doing so.

The cardiology service of the Hermanos Ameijeiras Clinical and Surgical Hospital

urgently requires a circulatory assist device to treat cardiogenic shock, for interventional cardiology and electrophysiology, allowing for the recovery of patients suffering from heart failure and prolonging their lives.

The U.S. company Abiomed, global leader in this market, supplies the Impella system, ideal for treating these conditions. In September 2016 and February 2017, Medicuba S.A. contacted the company in order to study the possibility of incorporating the product into the Cuban health system, which to date has refused to respond.

Mr. President:

We are deeply grateful to all the governments and peoples, parliaments, political forces and social movements, civil society representatives, international and regional organizations that have contributed with their voice and their vote, year after year, to support the justice and urgency of the abolition of the blockade.

We also extend our gratitude to the vast majority of the American people for their support of this commendable goal.

It offends humanity's conscience that the Ambassador of the United States has referred to the Bolivarian government of Venezuela in an unacceptable and interventionist way. She offends the heroic Venezuelan people, their civic-military union, and the Bolivarian Chavista government, led by President Nicolás Maduro Moros.

The government of the United States lies when it declares Venezuela a threat to its national security, which has, curiously, the largest certified hydrocarbon reserves on the planet.

As the Liberator Simón Bolívar wrote, "... the United States appear destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty." I respond to the

Ambassador with Bolívar's words.

We are in the midst of a clean, constitutional electoral process in Cuba, where seats are not bought, nor do special interests prevail, where there are no deceptive campaigns where money rules; elections in which the will of voters is not manipulated; elections in which division and hatred are not incited.

Mr. President:

We especially commend all those who have expressed concern and their rejection of the coercive measures announced by the current U.S. government.

The Cuban people will never give up building a sovereign, independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation. (Applause).

We will persevere, with the consensus of our people and especially the patriotic commitment of the youngest Cubans, in the anti-imperialist struggle and in defense of our independence, for which tens of thousands of Cubans have already fallen and we have run the greatest risks, as we demonstrated in Playa Girón and in the face of all threats.

We will maintain eternal loyalty to the legacy of José Martí and Fidel Castro Ruz. (Applause).

Mr. President:

Distinguished permanent representatives;  
Esteemed delegates:

Our people are following this debate with hope. On their behalf, I request that you vote in favor of draft resolution A/72/L.30, "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba."

Many thanks. (Prolonged applause).

Exclamations of: "Viva Cuba!" "Cuba sí, bloqueo no!" •



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# Polemic and innovative topics discussed in Cuban medical congresses



From left to right: psychologist Alberto Cobian Mena, endocrinologist Silvia Turcio Tristán, and urologist Tania González León.

Nuria Barbosa León (Text and photos)

• HAVANA recently hosted several medical conferences, providing spaces to discuss psychology in the health sector, urological and endocrinological diseases, and promote the exchange of knowledge about scientific developments in these specialties.

The Health Psychology event (Psicosalud 2017) was held from November 1-3 in Havana's International Conference Center and addressed issues such as: well-being and quality of life; family health; psychotherapeutic models; maternal, child and adolescent health; psycho-oncology, and human resources training, among others.

Dr. Alberto Cobian Mena, president of the Cuban Health Psychology Society explained to Granma International that the main themes of the event responded to the current situation and the dynamism of scientific knowledge. In addition, theoretical and methodological aspects of this branch of knowledge inside and outside of Cuba were debated, noting the role of several leading countries in the discipline.

Regarding this academic exchange, Cobian, who is also a senior and emeritus professor of the University of Santiago de Cuba, noted that positive psychology should be used to empower and promote optimism in patients, as loving, hopeful and determined thoughts can benefit the immune system and help prevent illness.

"Our great social aspiration is to have a healthy society, for that we must eliminate the hostility, the aggressiveness, the violence between individuals.

"In this context, where society is in crisis due to many anti-values present in today's world, because selfishness,

commercialism, looting and impudence predominate, it takes a lot of psychological intervention for people to find harmony," explained Cobian, a specialist in therapeutic hypnosis and psychoneuroimmunology.

Meanwhile, the 9th edition of Endocrinología 2017 was held November 8-10, to discuss immunology, genetics and endocrinology, diabetes mellitus, thyroid diseases, obesity, pituitary gland disorders, metabolic disorders and other issues; alongside the 3rd Congress on reproductive health in diabetic women, Seredia 2017.

In this regard, Dr. Silvia Turcio Tristán, a secondary level endocrinology specialist and professor and assistant researcher, stressed that the event aimed to discuss the most important issues in this medical field, and integrate the knowledge of different medical institutions, taking as a starting point the encouraging results obtained in recent years.

The president of the Cuban Endocrinology Society noted: "Today we are putting together the national registry of type 1 diabetic patients, to have accurate data on the prevalence of the disease within society. We currently estimate around one million patients with diabetes, of which we have only accounted for about 700,000. Hence assuming this control involves diagnosing one hundred percent of the population suffering from the disease including those who do not know that they are sick."

She also referred to thyroid gland diseases and those that cause infertility, topics discussed in scientific sessions held at the municipal and provincial levels, which due to their importance deserve to be addressed in a larger event to promote uniformity in their treatment based on global experiences.

With similar criteria, November 6-9 saw the 21st session of the Urology Congress, which brought together world experts dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of patients with genitourinary tract disorders. The discussion space also served to hold the 3rd Pediatric Urology Event; the 5th Ibero-American Encounter on Endourology, Shock Wave and Laparoscopic Surgery in Urology, and the 3rd International Event on Urological Nursing. Also running in parallel was the New York Section of the American Urological Association (AUA) Annual Meeting.

Speaking prior to the event, D.Sc. Tania González León, senior professor and researcher, pointed out that morning sessions would feature keynote speeches, while the afternoons would see academic discussions in different commissions. "Cuba will present innovative experiences in the use of lasers for the treatment of kidney diseases. We will discuss traditional and laparoscopic surgeries to remove malignant lesions, on the basis of preserving renal function in the patient, avoiding future dialysis or kidney transplantation."

Members of the Cuban Urology Society decided to dedicate a keynote lecture to the life and work of Dr. Joaquín Albarrán, a Cuban urologist who made important contributions to the field. They also wanted to highlight the work of each hospital with services in the specialty, and provided electronic posters with information on developments throughout the country.

The purpose of these different events is to provide attendees with a space to develop a broad exchange of ideas on methodological, theoretical and practical aspects in each specific discipline, and their links with other human health specialties and fields of knowledge. •

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# Technology: an investment in development

Latin America faces the challenge of building a digital economy based on innovation, growth, and productive efficiency

Yisel Martínez García

• OVER the last 10 years Latin America has made significant progress in the field of connectivity, with the most developed countries in the region gradually bridging the digital divide; providing more people with access to Internet. This has resulted in faster, cheaper connections and the growing presence of Latin Americans online. Although this sounds like good news, today half of all people living in the region are still unconnected, while the gap between those with access to the Internet of Things, for example, and those without, continues to widen.

Pablo Bello, executive director of the Inter-American Association of Telecommunications Companies (ASIT), which brings together the most important sector entities, both public and private, in Latin America, agreed to talk with **Granma International** about the challenges of technological development for the region, one of the most pressing of which, according to the regional expert, is closing the digital divide:

"This process requires a lot more investment. We're talking about building the most advanced networks, installing fiber optics, setting up fourth and fifth generation wireless. In order to do this and have world-class connectivity infrastructure, Latin American countries still need to take an important step to bridge the digital divide," he explained.

## BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Talking about closing the digital divide also means talking about investments and infrastructure at the level of those in developed countries, and knowing how to best use such resources.

"We need to know how to create value with connectivity, so that being connected basically means a better quality of life, creating sources of wealth, greater equality and opportunities for all.

"This is a field in which Latin America is still lacking. Efforts are being made to close the digital divide, but in terms of the efficient, productive and social use of information technologies as a key element for our development, we are very far behind the most developed countries," added Bello.

According to the ASIT director, another of the region's challenges includes trying to ensure that public policies focus on incorporating information technologies into all of their productive process, even the most rudimentary.

The idea is to do this in all Latin American countries and their productive sectors, and at the same time develop digital services, content, and applications which will enable us to bring about this technological transformation, while also

creating other types of productive activities based on, and making better use of, our own cultural resources. Of the 100 most popular websites in Latin America, 26 are Latin American, while three out of every four are foreign, noted Bello.

"Today, we are using the internet to transfer our cultural wealth to developed countries rather than within the region. We must take advantage of all that related to innovation, music, the arts, projects linked to our cultural attributes, languages, and use information technologies to do so," added Bello.

## WHY PRIORITIZE TECHNOLOGY?

On a continent such as Latin America, marked by disappointing economic growth and pressing social, healthcare, and educational needs, among others, why invest in technology and the internet when there are so many other urgent matters to address?

"It's about investing in the future, breaking the cycle of poverty and building a path toward growth and progress. It's a complex decision but when you look at the evidence and international studies, it's irrefutable," stated Pablo Bello.

According to reports on the region, if Latin America does not make significant headway in raising its productive competitiveness on a global level, its economic growth over the next 15 years will be between 40 to 50% lower than it has been during in the last 15 years.

"This means that if we don't make the changes to our productive infrastructure now, by incorporating the Internet and information technologies in order to create more value, what we are going to see is a lost decade. Ten, 15 years of very low growth during which poverty and misery will increase and problems will continue to get bigger.

"In order to break this vicious circle of poverty and meet the needs of citizens in terms of their quality of life, changes must be made to the region's productive infrastructure through the exhaustive use of technology. If we want to become developed countries, we have to do things differently and in order to do things differently we have to invest in technological change," explained Pablo Bello.

## PROGRESS IN LATIN AMERICA & CUBA

Several countries across Latin America have been making successful efforts to close the digital divide, most notably Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, and Costa Rica. However, according to Bello, despite the fact that all have very different policies and solutions, there are still sectors of the population in each of those countries,



Pablo Bello Arellano, ASIT executive director.

which are still unconnected. These are usually the poorest people, or those who live in remote areas, where connections either don't exist or are deficient.

"There are challenges in every country, but it's not about saying, that country has done well, we're going to copy them. Every nation is different and has its own characteristics. In some cases companies are public, in others they are private, or there's only one. Meanwhile, the evidence shows that positive results can be achieved with different models," stated Bello.

Regarding the region, the ASIT executive director noted that Cuba's indicators generally seem to be improving, before sharing his thoughts on the island's Plan for the Computerization of Cuban society, currently being implemented across the country.

"I think it's a well-defined plan and is progressing. Etecsa (national telecommunications entity) is undertaking important work in this sense with the expansion of wifi hotspots and home internet. This is all moving in the right direction; the problem is, of course, that Cuba has economic limitations, just like every other Latin American country. It's difficult for low-income families, which is why community models must be used, like the wifi hotspots in public areas. All this is moving in the right direction, but the issue now is how to speed up the process, something we have to work on together," insisted Pablo Bello.

What is happening in Cuba is very different from what's going on in other parts of the region, where although many countries are closing the digital gap and increasing internet access, there still remains much to be done in terms of the effective use, knowledge, skills, and practices associated with these information technologies.

In Cuba however, the situation seems to be the reverse; although it may have greater creative capacities, a significantly higher number of engineers and computer specialists working on developing digital solutions, applications for telemedicine, cultural pages, and projects, it is behind in terms of connectivity.

In this respect, Bello highlighted the enthusiasm and drive of young university students to maximize the potential of information technologies.

He went on to note how impressed he was with the country's development of healthcare applications linked to telemedicine, medical records, and hospital administration; while also praising Cuban engineers and computer specialists for their efficient and productive use of information technologies, as well as their ability to create solutions and develop applications, which has seen the island become a leader in this field, according to Bello.

"It's worth noting the extremely high level of Cuba's computer specialists, and specifically the role of women in the sector, which is far greater than that of other Latin American countries, where there is a clear difference, given that it is a male-dominated industry. I don't know how Cuba has been able to close the gender gap, but it's both exciting and fantastic to see women in leadership positions.

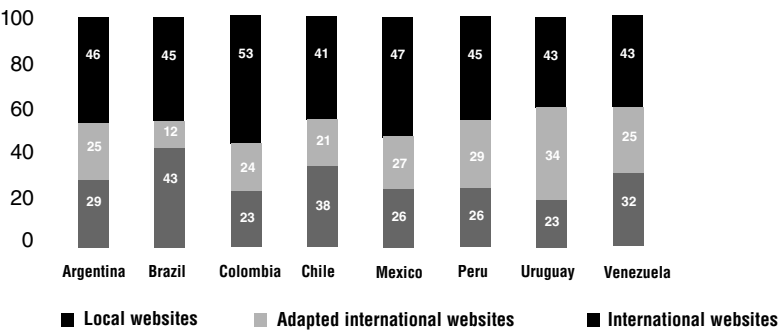
"I think Cuba's efforts to give universities the task of looking for solutions and creating working groups within the university context, in order to develop solutions for e-governance, and sectors like health, culture, and education, are without a doubt, a key element to the country's development.

"If I had to say anything it would be that Cuba needs to sell its skills and know-how abroad. Latin America needs to know about the work Cuba is doing, making the region a natural space where these solutions can even be sold. It's a market in which all this skill and knowledge can be used to generate more wealth for Cubans," stated ASIT's executive director.

Infrastructure, closing the digital divide, achieving world-class connectivity, telecommunications, and regional development in the field of technology is more than a good idea, it's a necessity; and doing so requires well-defined public policies able to generate the socio-economic changes needed to achieve this goal.

"Cuba is a leader in this regard. It is also a country from which Latin America has much to learn, and with great export potential, not only in terms of knowledge, but also solutions and software, applications and systems that could be used in other parts of Latin America." •

Latin America: Composition of the 100 most popular websites



Latin America

Source: UIT (2016)

53% of people do not use the Internet

66% of homes do not have an Internet connection



# Foreign investment opportunities in Cuba



Cuba is looking to attract foreign investment in the Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM).



A total of 156 new projects, representing investment of three billion dollars, were added to the new foreign investment portfolio

Yisel Martínez García

• **TRANSFORMING** the economy and achieving a prosperous, efficient and sustainable society is Cuba's aim. In order to do so, foreign investment is a fundamental source of development and an essential part of the country's current strategy, stated Minister of Foreign Trade

and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, during the presentation of the latest edition of the country's Portfolio of Foreign Investment Opportunities 2017-2018, as part of the 35th Havana International Fair. This year the Cuban Parliament approved the bases to elaborate the National Economic and Social Development Plan through 2030. The minister noted

that this portfolio is more comprehensive than previous editions, divided according to sectors on the basis of the National Plan. "Today foreign investment ceases to be a complement and has become an essential issue for the country. Work is centered on increasing the diversity of previous portfolios, in line with the general and sectoral policies that have been approved.

"We are transforming our economy, updating our model; we have defined the core ideas and the strategic sectors, and all this must be taken into account in the case of foreign capital investment. This portfolio is a reflection of the priorities identified in the bases for the elaboration of the (National) Plan," the Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment insisted.

A total of 156 new projects have been incorporated into this edition of the Portfolio, representing investment of around three billion dollars, of which 29 are located in the Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM). Meanwhile, the investment amounts required for 22 projects have been adjusted, and others have been removed as they have already materialized, or are in the advanced stages of negotiations.

In the financial banking sector, projects aimed at insurance activities have been expanded and the sectoral policy has been updated with the aim of developing new products and services for the benefit

of the Cuban market, which in turn can be exported. Likewise, the hydraulic sector policy has been broadened in response to the country's drought situation.

Below we provide a summary of the different sectors and main projects to be developed:

**Industrial sector - 33 projects:** Production and commercialization of electrical conductors and metal structures. Production of LED lighting and disposable material for medical use. Production and manufacture of flat glass. Management of a comprehensive Solid Waste Management system in the ZEDM.

**Agricultural, Forestry and Foods sector - 104 projects:** Pork production for the commercialization of finished pork products. Development and production of fresh vegetables in protected crops destined for export and the hard currency domestic market. The creation of a center for the elaboration of foods and a catering service in the ZEDM. Comprehensive project to raise beef cattle in stables with capacity for 5,000 heads. Production and commercialization of high quality coffee.

**Sugar industry sector - 7 projects:** Management of sugar mills with bioelectrical power. The creation of an alcohol distillery with capacity to produce 200,000 liters per day. Expansion and modernization of rum distilleries. Modernization

RICARDO LÓPEZ HEVIA



The latest edition of the country's Portfolio of Foreign Investment Opportunities 2017-2018 was presented during the 35th Havana International Trade Fair.

and increased scope of boiler factories.

**Tourism sector - 152 projects:** Building and marketing top-quality villas and hotels in various regions. Hotel management and commercialization contracts. Marina management agreements. Creation of a network of fishing and diving centers in protected areas, a water park, the Abra de Canasí nature and adventure park, and the establishment of an international equestrian club.

**Energy sector - 13 projects:** These are priorities and based on the development of renewable energy sources. Among them are wind farms, 11 bioelectrical plants, and 100MW photovoltaic solar farms, with 50MW accumulation.

**Mining sector - 10 projects:** Geological recognizance or investigation (prospecting/exploration) for precious metals (gold, silver), base metals (copper, lead, zinc) and other minerals of interest in various regions.

**Transportation sector - 8 projects:** Repair and maintenance services of naval vessels. Operation and management of Casa Blanca shipyards. Remodeling of the Bahía de Cabañas shipyard. Light vehicle rental services for ZEDM users.

**Pharmaceutical industry and biotechnology sector - 15 projects:** Production of vaccines for cancer treatment. Plants for blood-based products, biomaterials, cytostatics, oral contraceptive pills and hormones, and avian vaccines.

**Health sector - 2 projects:** Quality of life services. The creation of an international clinic for sports medicine, anti-doping control and education.

**Construction sector - 14 projects:** Modernization of engineering systems for construction and assembly. Capital repairs service for construction equipment. Rental, maintenance and repairs of construction and hauling equipment. Increasing the

potential of marble. The last two projects are located in the ZEDM.

**Business sector - 4 projects:** Logistical operator to manage chains of refrigerated foods suppliers. Wholesale textiles, dry goods and accessories.

**Hydraulic sector - 7 projects:** Modernization of the production of spare parts, accessories and other plastic elements. Deep well drilling services. Production management of smooth or corrugated pipes. Hydro-geological services applied to the control of the water table.

**Cultural sector - 2 projects:** Linked to the promotion and commercialization of products and services in this field.

**Audiovisual sector - 3 projects:** Building and setting up of a forum for high-definition audiovisual productions and co-productions. Establishing a system of pay-per-view channels for Cuban TV. Informatics and educational audiovisual productions.

**Oil sector - 78 projects:** Risk oil exploration and shared production contracts in blocs of the Cuban Exclusive Economic Zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Secondary recovery contracts for deposits being exploited.

**Real estate sector - 1 project:** Building and management of standard warehouse facilities in the ZEDM.

**Logistics sector - 1 project:** Building and operating comprehensive logistical facilities and services in the ZEDM.

"In total this portfolio has 456 projects for a capital amount of 10.7 billion dollars. The projects are distributed throughout the country and reflect the bases of the National Development Plan through 2030," Malmierca Díaz reported.

"Right now, there are 80 projects in the negotiation phase with real possibilities of materializing, of them, 15 are in a very



Twenty nine of the 156 new foreign investment projects are located in the Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM).

advanced stage of negotiation and could be approved before the end of the year, for an investment amount of over one billion dollars," he added.

Since the passing of the Foreign Investment Law in 2014, 22 reinvestments, 25 new businesses in the Mariel Special Development Zone, and 85 more outside it, have been approved, with companies from more than 20 countries.

The Minister for Foreign Trade and Investment explained the advantages of investing in Cuba. He noted the importance of having a well-defined general and sectoral policy, as well as a safe and transparent body of law, that fosters a stable climate for foreign personnel.

He also highlighted the relevance of Cuba's strategic position, a government policy that prioritizes innovation and research, and the maintenance of basic infrastructure that allows any investor to develop in the Cuban market.

In order for the Cuban economy to dynamically grow, capital accumulation rates of over 20% are required, representing foreign investment inflows of about 2 billion dollars a year. This will not be achieved overnight, and it is necessary to create a business and commercial environment attractive to foreign investment, which is only possible by ensuring this sector is recognized as an essential source in Cuba's future plans. •

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Guido López Gavilán conducts the National Symphony Orchestra in the Amadeo Roldan Theater.



German Thomas Gabrisch has conducted some 200 operas, 40 different concert programs and his own compositions in the theaters across his country, including the Deutsche Opera am Rhein, in Freiburg, Nuremberg, Colonia, and Essen.

# Mahler's monumental Symphony No.2

German conductor Thomas Gabrisch leads Cuba's National Symphonic Orchestra and a choir of more than 100 voices

Mireya Castañeda

• THERE are more than 120 recorded versions of the immortal **Symphony No.2 in D minor** by Gustav Mahler, under the baton of renowned conductors including Leonard Bernstein, Leopold Stokowski, Zubin Mehta, Claudio Abbado, and Pierre Boulez. One thing is for sure, hearing the symphony in the privacy of one's home is nothing like a live performance. Seeing the conductor, musicians, the singers, is an unforgettable experience.

Music lovers in Havana had the good fortune to hear the marvelous **Symphony No.2**, also known as the *Resurrection*, one of the most acclaimed worldwide, during one of the National Symphony Orchestra's customary Sunday performances (October 29).

The orchestra, lead by Maestro Enrique Pérez Mesa, performed on this occasion under the direction of distinguished German conductor Thomas Gabrisch, professor at the Robert Schumann School of Music and Media in Düsseldorf, who has been invited over the last five years to not only conduct the Symphony Orchestra, but the Havana Chamber Orchestra, as well. In 2013, he conducted the Symphony's performance of Mahler's **Symphony No.3**.

For the Havana performance of the enormous work, Gabrisch invited German soprano Sabine Schneider who, along with Cuban contralto María Felicia Pérez, assumed the solo vocal roles.

The work requires a large orchestra and a mixed choir - more than 100 voices for this performance, from the German choir Ratingen; and several Cuban groups including the Schola Cantorum Coralina (directed by Alina Orraca); the Exaudi Chamber Choir (director María Felicia Pérez); the Camerata Vocal Sine Nomine (director Leonor Suárez); and the ICRT choir (director Liagne Reyna).

Within the world of classical music, **Symphony No.2** by Mahler (Austria 1860-1911) is considered one of the most elaborate ever written for a symphonic orchestra and choir. Its dimensions are impressive, born of the composer's reflections on life, death, and resurrection.

Cuban composer and conductor Guido López-Gavilán was, on this occasion, a spectator in the National Theater's

Avellaneda Hall, and commented for our readers, "It took Mahler years to write this work (1888-1894) and he did so in intervals. It is evidence of his talent for working the orchestra, the great sonorities, the impressive durations, and it is one of the pieces most performed on the world's great stages. It is a great stroke of luck to have the opportunity to hear it. Tomas Gabrisch has done an admirable job. This is the first time it has been performed in Cuba, at least that I know of."

Mahler, considered one of the greatest and most original symphonic composers, produced nine works in this genre, and sketched out a tenth before his death. No.2 was well received when it was premiered in Berlin under his direction, on December 13, 1895.

One of his most popular, the work is composed of five movements, during which the listener is presented with multiple atmospheres, ideas, and moods, thanks to the wonderful orchestration.

The spectacular finale, the canto to resurrection, ascends little by little from *pianissimo* to the grandiose climax, an ode to faith. This last movement is the longest, lasting more than half an hour.

María Felicia Pérez, who in addition to providing the contralto voice was responsible for preparation and rehearsals with the five choirs, commented for **Granma International** on the great significance of the performance in Havana.

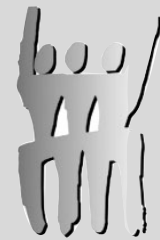
"This is something we have not had the opportunity to do; it is a gigantic work, as you heard, an extraordinary work with orchestration of profound harmonic, tonal, and rhythmic richness. It is one of the great works from the turn of the century, between the 19th and 20th, and re-creating a piece in German with such a philosophical text, was not easy."

The director of Exaudi added, "I had never sung it in all the my years of my musical career, so I am very happy, and also because young singers have been able to sing it and show that we are developing. Playing this extraordinary work helps develop the National Symphony Orchestra, too, in which there are also many young players, and they've had this opportunity. And I'll add something else. It's magnificent for the orchestra, the choirs, the public to have contact with this

score, that is not performed every day, because its huge and requires a great deal of time to stage. Having the opportunity to hear it in the theater is something marvelous."

Austrian composer Gustav Mahler's immortal **Symphony No.2, Resurrection**,

was experienced in Havana's National Theater and participants came to understand what the composer was thinking about symphonies when he said, "They must be like the world, they must encompass it all." •



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# Juantorena has high hopes for Cuban athletes

• SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- The notable progress made by Cuba in key disciplines, above all the triple and long jump, will be decisive as the country looks toward the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, according to Alberto Juantorena, President of the Cuban Athletics Federation, speaking in this city. Also Vice President of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), Juantorena praised the level of young athletes such as Maikel Massó and Juan Miguel Hechevarría, both long jumpers, as well as the more experienced, including discus thrower Denia Caballero and pole vaulter Yarisley Silva. We have to look after our young athletes and the give them the necessary confidence to achieve Olympic success, the winner of

the 400 and 800 meters in the 1976 Montreal Games added. Meanwhile, the Central American and Caribbean Games in Barranquilla, Colombia, next year, will be a big challenge for the Cuban team, according to Juantorena. Most countries want to win every event, but it's impossible for one nation to dominate in throwing disciplines as well as sprint and long distance races, jumping events and multi-sport competitions. However, we do have athletes that can help to place Cuba at the top of the country medal chart, and I'm sure that's just what we will do, he stated. "We are working hard every day, revising training plans, athletes must be in top form, from the qualifying rounds right through to the final," stressed Juantorena.

Meanwhile, the sporting official also noted that although the city has a new gymnasium and two new race tracks, which are soon set to be completed, the most important thing is the technical aspect and the work of coaches. Likewise, Juantorena highlighted the high costs associated with athletics: for example a single javelin costs about 700 USD, a pole vault 1,500 USD, and accompanying mat 46,000 USD; while the price of the synthetic material used for a six lane race track is about half a million dollars. Finally, around 30 Cuban athletes have qualified for the 2018 Barranquilla competition, reported the former sprinter, currently touring universities in the east of the island. (ACN) •



Juantorena highlighted the importance of the work of coaches with young athletes.

## BASKETBALL IN EL SALVADOR

# Torres and Valdés win silver



Torres during a decisive game.

Jorge Carlos de la Paz

• CUBAN basketball players Orestes Torres and Lisván Valdés finished second in the last round of El Salvador's basketball league, after their team Santa Tecla BC lost against Halcones de Sonzacate in the final. The title was decided in the fourth and final round of this series, with a score of 74-83, depriving the pair from Havana of a repeat of their past win against the Halcones de Sonzacate in the last championship. Led by Captain Jared Ruiz, from Puerto Rico, top scorer with 32 points, 11 rebounds and seven set ups, Sonzacate dominated the competition with

three wins and one loss to secure their first title in the history of the tournament. During the final, Torres scored 20 points, while a penalty incurred after a clash between Valdés and Sonzacate's Marco Tejeda on Saturday, November 4, which Santa Tecla BC immediately appealed, saw the Cuban benched for the entire match. The series final of the Salvadoran competition was marked by hostile and offensive behavior from the Sonzacate fans toward the Tecla BC team and match referees. According to a report from Charly Morales, Prensa Latina correspondent in El Salvador, a photojournalist documenting the actions of the Sonzacate fans against the

Santa Tecla players was assaulted by the president of the winning team's entourage, after fans stormed the pitch, causing the local police to intervene. Santa Tecla called on the Salvadoran Basketball Federation and national Major League to sanction to the Sonzacate team, however, no action has been taken to date. A total of six Cuban players are currently on loan to Salvadoran teams, which as well as Torres and Valdés, include, point guard Osmel Oliva from Artemisa, center Yoel Cubillas from Villa Clara, with the El Rápido team; in addition to two female players: Arlenis Romero and the recently acquired Leydis Oquendo, both with Santa Tecla. •

## 2018 VOLLEYBALL MEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

# Last of the 24 qualifying teams to be decided in Pinar del Río

Alfonso Nacianceno

• WITH the African qualifier for the 2018 Volleyball Men's World Championship over, only the North, Central America and Caribbean Volleyball Confederation (NORCECA) qualifier, to be held November 10-12 in Pinar del Río, remains to complete the 24 teams to compete in the Championship to be co-hosted for the first time. Italy and Bulgaria will host the competition, held every four years, a novelty that will see the tournament take place across the cities of Bari, Bologna, Florence,

Milan, Rome and Turin in the Italian peninsula; while the Bulgarian capital of Sofia and the resort of Varna and Ruse will also host world volleyball players, September 10-30, 2018. Both nations have their place at the tournament secured, while the other 20 teams to have qualified are: Poland, current World Champion, which hosted the 2014 edition; France, Holland, Slovenia, Russia, Serbia, Finland and Belgium, from the European continent. Meanwhile, Japan, Iran, China and Australia make up the Asian teams, Brazil and

Argentina will represent South America, whilst Tunisia, Egypt and Cameroon will represent the African continent. The United States, the Dominican Republic (returning to the competition after a 44-year absence), and Canada were the three teams to qualify in the NORCECA event previously held in Colorado Springs, the U.S., which Cuba and Puerto Rico were unable to attend given the passage of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, respectively. The U.S. city, considered the heart of the country's volleyball movement, was set to decide five teams for the 2018 World

Championships, but as the Cuban and Puerto Rican teams were unable to participate, it was decided that the top three teams would qualify, with the remaining two to be decided in Pinar del Río. The Cuban city's 19 de Noviembre volleyball court will see the two Caribbean teams compete alongside Mexico and Guatemala, who came fourth and fifth in Colorado Springs. The hosts and Puerto Rico are expected to have the best chances of qualifying in this single round-robin tournament to secure a place at the World competition. •



The first obstacle Cuban specialists had to overcome was unloading the trucks at Roseau port.



Cuban specialists are working on a primary line linking the capital with the hydroelectric plant in Trafalgar, eight kilometers away.

Sergio Alejandro Gómez Gallo,  
Special correspondent (Text & photos)

• ROSEAU.—Dominica has been without power since September 18. Hurricane Maria brought down thousands of electricity poles, destroyed kilometers of power lines and left the majority of transmission infrastructure practically inoperable.

So far, Dominica Electricity Services (Domlec) has been working to reestablish power across vital facilities, such as hospitals, banks and government offices.

But six weeks after the storm, electricity has only been restored to a few areas across main cities, while the rest of the country is still without power.

There are barely 30 electricity specialists on the island, which also lacks the technical means to undertake such an enormous task.

According to estimates from Domlec, 90% of the 8,000 poles from the primary system and 19,000 from the secondary, which supply homes, suffered some sort of damage.

Neighboring countries like Jamaica and Barbados have sent reinforcements from their own power companies, but reports on the ground estimate that it will be several months before power is fully restored.

#### CUBA'S CONTRIBUTION

As part of Cuba's efforts to help and support Dominica, the country sent a ship carrying 300 tons of vital resources, ten forestry specialists, a group of young diplomats and two brigades composed of five linemen each, from Pinar del Río and Sancti Spíritus, to the island on October 20.

Meanwhile, three electricians responsible for evaluating the situation in the country

and supervising work on the ground, as well as four support workers, a mechanic, power plant specialist and two cooks, also travelled to the island.

Each brigade brought with it a multi-purpose vehicle featuring a crane mechanism for work on electricity lines and digging tool to set new posts, to add to the only three other such vehicles in the country.

But before they could get to work on the streets of the island, Cuban specialists had to overcome an initial obstacle: the trucks were too heavy for the crane at Roseau port to unload from the ship.

So, technicians decided to disassemble them onboard and unload them piece by piece; starting with the operating booth and then the rest of the vehicle, including wheels and other heavy parts.

Once unloaded, they were quickly reassembled, in an operation which at one point seemed impossible, but was completed in just three hours.

#### FIRST STEPS

According to specialists, the priority in a situation like that affecting Dominica is to restore the power system and primary lines in order to supply consumers with electricity.

As such, for the past week the Cubans have been working to reestablish a primary network between Roseau and the hydroelectric plant in Trafalgar, some eight kilometers away and which was cut off after the hurricane.

"When it's up and running, and we've connected the capital's diesel plant to the hydroelectric facility located close by, we'll have more power," stated Edelfín Falcón Guerra, head of the Electrical Union of Cuba brigade in Dominica,

speaking to **Granma**.

Falcón, who works as technical director of the entity in Artemisa, added that the power supply should be further stabilized after the substation located in the Padu hydroelectric plant, close to Trafalgar, is hooked up.

As well as the state of the network, the topography of the area has complicated the work. The line stretches from the city over several neighboring hills and then descends down an over 300 foot gorge. The final part of the line, before it reaches the hydroelectric plant, is built along a river which winds through mountains, measuring over 1,500 feet.

The tropical climate doesn't help either, with heavy downpours interrupting work.

Ramiro Frías Leiva, one of the linemen and operator of the multi-purpose vehicles, described the risks and difficulties of installing new posts in the rocky terrain along the river.

"The chain can break and even the drill itself," he noted, adding: "We have to work bit by bit."

Frías, who has been operating these vehicles for over 30 years, also had to quickly adapt to driving on the left-hand side of the road, as they do in Dominica.

Lisbanet Rodríguez Hernández, head of the Sancti Spíritus brigade, stated that his specialists have had to deal with similarly difficult jobs on the Topes de Colantes hills, in the municipality of Trinidad.

"Nonetheless we were given training to explain the conditions on the ground and characteristics of the country," he stated, adding that "we hold daily meetings to review the work and risks we could face."

#### THE GOLDEN RULES OF SAFETY

The number of damaged posts, broken

cables, fallen trees and unstable ground around power lines, represent an added danger for the Cuban brigades.

Diego La Rosa, head of the Electrical Union's Health and Safety team, was one of the first specialists to arrive in Dominica, three days after Hurricane Maria hit.

According to La Rosa, risks increase with time, noting that many people have already started to set up their own generators which, if installed incorrectly, could affect the networks the linemen are currently working on.

"As long as you obey the five golden rules, there shouldn't be any problems," explained Rosa, reciting them from memory: "disconnect the power; ensure that all other possible connections are blocked; check that there is absolutely no power circulating; connect the lines to the ground; and in short-circuits, connect lines to each other; and lastly, signpost the work area."

He also highlighted the importance of using protective gear and complying with the correct procedures when working on power lines and with cranes.

"The risks are more or less the same when working up posts anywhere," according to Dachel Jiménez Bernal, a lineman from group 8, trained to work on live lines.

The most important thing, he noted, is to check that the posts aren't broken.

Working at a height of 48 feet to restore the connection between Trafalgar and the capital, Jiménez noted that this is lower than the 110Kv lines they are used to in Cuba.

"Cuban electricians have developed great skill in dealing with adverse weather events over the years," stated Edelfín Falcón. "Now, we are sharing our experiences with the sister nation of Dominica." •

**Working to ensure patient happiness**



Three protagonists of this compassionate work, from left to right: Dr. Jesús Rivas, Nurse Sara Tovar, and Dr. Odalys Pagés.

## VENEZUELA

Alina Perera Robbio,  
special for **Granma International**  
(Text & photos)

• BARINAS, Venezuela.-Traces of the violence unleashed in April, which lasted over 100 days, and with which some hoped to paralyze the country, are still visible in main areas of the capital of this State.

The scenes of burning tire and medical warehouses are remembered with sadness, as well as the arrival of outsiders preparing to mount protests against the government in the main squares.

Residents became exhausted with the distribution to their usual peace and daily routine, as they told the Cuban collaborators who live and work alongside them, and who also witnessed the nightmare situation which only drew to a close following the popular vote of July 30 to elect the National Constituent Assembly (ANC).

"I remained strong throughout, I never cried," states Lázara Polledo Cuní, a 35-year-old Cuban from the province of Matanzas, in the La Pozones de Barinas Opticians. With a degree in Optometry and Optics, she has been working in Venezuela for almost two years, her second internationalist mission.

She can hardly forget the day in May when, amid street riots, she felt she might die.

"That day there were guarimbas (violent street barricades) and I, as usual, went to work. That was the worst day of my life. Around noon shots were heard, a 19-year-old boy was killed; three women arrived to the outpatient center in front of the opticians seriously affected by the tear gas grenades."

The collaborator recalls that the relatives of the deceased, who spoke openly against Chavistas, were masked and armed and calling for revenge. Lázara thought that the opticians would be burned down, as another one had already been set alight and threats were heard against the Cubans here.

It was gone 5.00pm and she couldn't leave her workplace; it seemed impossible that anyone would come and rescue her. Fortunately, a young soldier who knew her from the town where she lived went to meet her. Very discreetly he managed to get to the clinic and asked her not to say a word - so she wouldn't be identified as Cuban; thus they managed to leave in the midst of the shooting. They covered a distance of more than three kilometers in record time. Lázara could not stop thinking about her loved ones, especially her 15-year-old daughter and her five-year-old son.

As she concludes her story about those terrible hours, Lázara shares an expression that sums up the courage and commitment of the Cuban collaborators: "Here we are..." She adds that "There are opposition members who have come here for consultations. Many do not know why they are opposed (to the government). They almost always respond and say I'm right when I explain that thanks to Chávez and the Revolution they can receive care: 'Doctor, they tell me you are right.' This is the immense battle. And we have to help and move forward."

On the day of our visit we were also welcomed by the Cubans Isandra Revilla Rodríguez, a 26-year-old from the province of Santiago de Cuba (Optometry and Optics graduate), María Zamora Acosta, a 48-year-old from Bayamo (who assembles the eyeglasses), and Luis Benítez Álvarez, a 30-year-old from Camagüey (Optometry and Optics graduate). Peaceful times have returned here, but even in the most adverse circumstances, these collaborators did not stop offering their very best to the Venezuelan people.

### ENDLESS COMPASSION

Facing the opticians is the León Foortul Saavedra Outpatient Center, where we met



The Buen vivir (Good Living) program for diabetic patients was created thanks to the Ministry of People's Power for Health of Venezuela, and the Barrio Adentro (Inside the Neighborhood) Mission, which has the unconditional support of Cuban health professionals and technicians.

three specialists who work to heal the painful injuries of those who, if not treated, would have to have their lower extremities amputated.

Dr. Odalys Pagés Gómez, a plastic surgeon and diabetic foot specialist, has been working in Barinas since May. From the province of Santiago de Cuba, she tells us while preparing a set of dressings that in the "patient/doctor relationship we have to take great care, because those who arrive here suffer from a chronic disease, and immense pain."

In Venezuela before 2008, of the total number of patients who arrived at hospital centers suffering from diabetic foot ulcers, the amputation figures ranged from between 60 and 80%, according to data from the country's Metabolic Endocrine Program Office of the Ministry of People's Power for Health.

Today, thanks to the Buen vivir (Good Living) program for diabetic patients, which celebrated its 9th anniversary on August 18, amputation figures have been reduced to 3%. The program, founded a year after the initiative was implemented in Cuba, is designed to treat patients with diabetic foot ulcers through the use of the Cuban medicine Heberprot-P, a recombinant human epidermal growth factor.

The Buen vivir program came about thanks to the Venezuelan Health Ministry and the Barrio Adentro (Inside the Neighborhood) Mission, which has the unconditional support of Cuban health professionals and technicians. Covering a large part of the national territory, the Mission has allowed for more efficient identification of patients in need of Heberprot-P.

"The people who come here are those with fewer resources," Dr. Odalys notes, "Those who have more purchasing power often go to private clinics, and when they come to us it is because they need to undergo some minor amputation, because in those private

clinics what they do is "patch" them up, but when it comes to the crunch those affected come to us. This way we often avoid complications such as major amputations."

Working alongside Odalys is general practitioner Dr. Jesús Rivas Fajardo. He is Venezuelan, but has a strong connection with the island: he received his professional training in the Cuban province of Matanzas and is now happy to be teamed up with a Cuban colleague. "I have seen patients who have come here very depressed and who have left with a smile," he says, "That is what gives us satisfaction because what we seek is to help, to seek people's happiness."

Jesús studied for a diploma in diabetic foot care, and has not stopped his further training as a doctor. He is very grateful to a Cuban angiologist named Juan, who taught him much of what he knows today. "The treatment in a private clinic for this type of patient is very expensive; involving angiologists, traumatologists, and internists. It is a difficult path that few patients want to go through."

Nursing graduate Sara Tovar, a Venezuelan who specializes in diabetic foot care, is the third member of this dedicated team, trained to understand the immense pain of their patients, demonstrating endless compassion.

"This is a school," Sara stresses, "for anyone who enters as a student or as a professional. Every day you learn, from Monday to Friday. We work together, both patients and relatives and the health team."

Sara looks at us as another patient arrives and states: "God gave me these hands for this."

The "this" she refers to encapsulates a fundamental purpose and all the efforts that our health collaborators, alongside those of Venezuela, make to bring joy and happiness to so many others. •



# Sandinismo victorious in municipal elections

• MANAGUA.— The Alliance of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) won Nicaragua's municipal elections with 75.88% of the votes counted, according to the last report issued by the Supreme Electoral Council.

With a turnout of around 53% of the electorate, the FSLN obtained 1,820,134 votes, to take the lead in at least 148 of the 153 municipalities of the country.

The Constitutionalist Liberal Party took second place, with 200,627 votes, followed by Citizens for Liberty (10,038 votes), the Conservative Party (22,367), and the Yatama regional party (12,188).

In the capital of Managua, the FSLN Alliance secured the nine municipalities of the department, to consolidate itself as the country's leading political force.

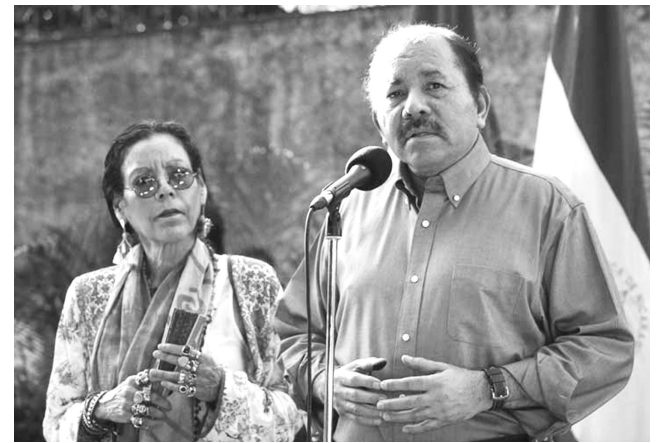
President of the Conservative Party, Alfredo César, recognized in a statement the results of the municipal elections, in which the Alliance led by the FSLN secured a comfortable victory, as **El 19 Digital** reported.

César noted that the majority of the people had sent a message, through the polls, to solve the country's problems through peaceful elections.

On Sunday, November 5, more than 3.8 million Nicaraguans were registered to elect mayors, deputy mayors, councilors and their deputies, who will form municipal governments throughout the country, including those located in the autonomous regions of the Caribbean coast.

Both the Electoral Observatory of the National Council of Universities and the electoral accompaniment mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) agreed that the electoral process was conducted in peace and tranquility.

A mission of international experts, composed of specialists from Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Chile, also endorsed the transparency and smooth development of the elections, as well as the broad representation of different political groups and the presence of party tellers. (PL) •



President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo stressed that greater security and peace of mind for all was achieved during the electoral process.

## THE UNITED STATES

# Firearm democracy

Jeiddy Martínez Arma

• "GUNS don't kill people - Americans kill people," noted filmmaker Michael Moore once said.

On November 5, about a month after the Las Vegas massacre, described as the largest in the United States' recent history, another similar event occurred, this time in Texas, when a man opened fire killing at least 27 people and injuring dozens more, who were congregated in the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs.

After so many deaths in the United States due to shootings, the same question repeatedly arises: is the free sale of firearms democracy? In a free and democratic country, people are not afraid to go out into the streets. In the face of so much violence, the possession of guns does not seem to be the solution for U.S. citizens to feel safe.

The use of firearms is permitted by the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution adopted December 15, 1791. Since then, just how many massacres have taken place in the name of this so-called "freedom?" Despite the numerous fatalities and constant criticism, the U.S. Senate continues to refuse to pass legislation restricting the sale and use of firearms.

Arms sales in the most powerful country in the world are a multi-million dollar business



The Texas church shooting gunman, identified as Devin Patrick Kelley, posted photos of the firearms he used on his social media.

and the National Rifle Association (NRA) works to protect this "right."

Following the shooting in Texas, described as the fourth deadliest in the history of the United States, President Donald Trump stated in a press conference during his tour of five Asian countries that it was the result of a "mental

health problem" and not a "guns situation."

Such a statement, like so many of his administration, reveals a huge contradiction, because as part of his good relations with the National Rifle Association, according to the news agency EFE, "U.S. President Donald Trump approved in March the suspension of a

regulation promoted by former President Barack Obama to prevent people with mental illness from purchasing guns, marking a victory for pro-gun groups such as the aforementioned NRA."

According to the same source, "the norm, which was estimated to affect 75,000 people, required the Social Security

Administration to notify the federal government of the names of people with a history of mental illness to prevent them from buying weapons."

In addition, within the series of executive orders on gun control approved by Obama, vendors must have licenses to sell and conduct background checks, and the sale of military-style assault weapons is banned.

As Donald Trump works to reverse such regulations signed by his predecessor, many families, like those that were affected in the small town of Sutherland Springs, Texas, will face the possibility of one day mourning a loved one. Each year the lives of more than 30,000 Americans are cut short by guns, according to official figures.

Weapons do not make a person feel better. Knowing that a gun or a rifle can end the life of another human being should be reason enough not to freely purchase them.

According to a study conducted by U.S. researcher Michael Siegel, some 300 million firearms are in circulation in the United States, that's almost one per person. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that "for each percentage point increase in gun ownership, the firearm homicide rate increased by 0.9%." These are not very encouraging figures for a society experiencing decisive moments, while it continues to promote and impose its bloodstained ideal of "democracy." •

# A new chapter of relations between Cuba and the EU

Gabriela Avila & Dayron Rodríguez

• CUBA and the European Union opened a new chapter in bilateral relations after the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between the two parties provisionally entered into force, this November 1.

In a press release, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that "the ties between Brussels and Havana have reached a level more in line with relations between Cuba and the member states which make up the community bloc, which have experienced significant progress over recent years."

Meanwhile, in a statement by the EU, the organization noted that the agreement shows that the bloc is moving closer to Cuba, a nation that is currently undergoing a process of "economic, political and social modernization," according to the document.

Negotiations to establish a Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement began in April 2014 and concluded in March 2016; with the document signed in Brussels, on December 12, 2016, by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez.

The signing also marked the end of the EU Common Position, in force since 1996, during which time relations between the two parties practically froze.

Regarding the provisional implementation of the PDCA and what it means for both Cuba and the European Union, **Granma** spoke exclusively with the Head of the EU Delegation to Cuba, Alberto Navarro.

The official began by recalling that relations between Cuba and the EU were established in 1988, but were restricted for over 20 years (1996-2016) due to the so-called Common Position.

Nonetheless, he noted that in 2008, political dialogue was re-launched, as well as bilateral cooperation with the island, which received a significant boost after the Agreement was officially signed on December 12, 2016.

Now, with the provisional application of the agreement, both parties have a legal framework to formalize political dialogue and strengthen cooperation in various spheres.

In short, the agreement represents the start of a new and beneficial chapter for Cubans and Europeans, as the agreement will allow us to establish a more serious and mature relationship, stated the EU official.

Navarro went on to explain that the document is being applied on a provisional basis and will be definitively implemented once it is approved by the Parliaments of the bloc's 28 member-states.

So far the document has been ratified by Germany, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, while the remaining 22 nations are expected to do so over the coming months, although this kind of process usually takes about two years, he noted.



GABRIELA AVILA

The Head of the European Union Delegation to Cuba talked about the provisional application of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the island and the EU.

## THE AGREEMENT

The provisional application of the PDCA marks the beginning of new processes and the continuation of others. According to the EU representative, as part of political dialogue initiatives, an EU-Cuba Council will start to be held at least every two years, presided by Bruno Rodríguez and Federica Mogherini, with the bloc's 28 member-states acting as observers.

These meetings will discuss the state of relations between Cuba and the European bloc, their respective regional contexts, as well as shared challenges, including multilateralism, international law, climate change, and conflict prevention, among others.

Cooperation efforts meanwhile will include continuation of the process which was re-sumed in 2008.

In this regard, from 2008 to 2017, the EU has provided some 120 million euros in funding for projects in the Caribbean nation, across sectors such as food security, renewable energy, specialist exchanges, and disaster preparation and response; all toward supporting Cuba's development.

As for commercial exchanges, the EU is one of

Cuba's top trading partners, and although PDCA doesn't establish free trade, it does feature an important commercial component, highlighted Navarro.

Regarding current projects, he mentioned a renewable energy initiative and another linked to sustainable agriculture and food security.

Meanwhile, he also mentioned the upcoming inauguration of the Reference Center for Adolescents in Old Havana; a collaborative project between Cuba, the EU, UNICEF and the Havana City Historian's Office.

Also in the cultural sphere, Navarro noted the opening of the Center for the Interpretation of Cultural Relations between Cuba and Europe, in Havana's Palacio del Segundo Cabo.

## A SERIOUS AND MATURE RELATIONSHIP

The head of the EU delegation on the island highlighted Cuba's achievements in sectors such as health and education and stressed the importance of maintaining such accomplishments by incorporating new technologies in these areas.

He also noted the growing presence of the island at an international level, which despite its

small size, is continuing to gain recognition.

Meanwhile, Navarro noted that the EU has been supporting Cuba in recovery efforts following different natural disasters which have affected the country.

He also mentioned the annual UN vote against the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. on Cuba, and which coincided with the implementation of the agreement between the island and the EU.

The community's 28 member-states have repeatedly condemned this policy as a violation of the fundamental human rights of the Cuban people, stated Navarro, who went on to note that the blockade is an illegal and immoral policy, which goes against international law. "More can be achieved through dialogue than isolation... the European Union believes in building bridges, not erecting walls," he stated.

## GROWTH IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS

The European Union is a unique organization in the world, which represents a legal community centered on the importance of community law and its direct application, stated Navarro.

Founded just 60 years ago, the bloc has achieved a great deal including the establishment of a common market founded on the principle of "four freedoms": the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons within the EU; it has its own currency (the Euro) and agreements with other countries worldwide.

However, as Navarro highlighted, the bloc is currently facing many internal challenges, including the negotiation of the United Kingdom's withdrawal (Brexit), which despite the negative impact it will have on both parties, should be able to be resolved amicably.

Meanwhile, reforms presented by French President, Emmanuel Macron, represent yet another challenge for the bloc. The European leader is proposing to establish a common budget for the Euro Zone and defense policy for the region, in what some analysts are describing as the re-founding of the EU.

However, despite these challenges and other global issues linked to achieving peace and stability, Navarro noted that "We have continued to grow in times of crisis." •

# Cuba supports Palestinian self-determination at the UN

• UNITED NATIONS.-Cuba expressed its support for the two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

In a debate by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the UN General Assembly, Cuban representative Humberto Rivero reiterated the island's support for the Palestinian struggle for a free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Rivero also defended the call for the capital of the Palestinian state to be East Jerusalem, corresponding to the boundaries existing

prior to the Israeli occupation of 1967, and the return of refugees.

"We reiterate our firm support and solidarity for the just cause of the Palestinian people, and the need to redouble efforts to resolve the plight of its refugees, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant UN resolutions," he stressed.

The Cuban diplomat acknowledged the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), despite its lack of financial resources.

According to Rivero, the report discussed in the Fourth Committee on this matter

accurately reflects the services provided by the agency to Palestinians in key sectors such as health and education.

"As mentioned in the report, despite the operational deficit that it (the UNRWA) faced once again to meet the requirements of its mandate, it was able to provide human development services and humanitarian aid quickly and efficiently," he insisted.

The Cuban representative called for greater support for this agency, responsible for assisting Palestinian refugees, and criticized those who for political reasons threaten to further reduce financial contributions to its operations. (PL). •

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*Gamma*

# **U.S. organization supports Cuba's struggles**

## **When altruism is more than just a word**

Nuria Barbosa León

Photo: Orlando Perera (Courtesy of ICAP)

• IN defiance of the U.S. government's attempts to spread fear and discredit Cuba's reputation as a safe country, members of the U.S. Non-governmental organization CODEPINK, visited the Caribbean island to show their opposition to the White House's hostile policy.

Speaking before national press outlets at the Havana headquarters of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), the activists condemned the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. on Cuba, called for the closure of the illegal Naval Base in Guantánamo, and for the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

CODEPINK, founded on November 17, 2002, is a women-led grassroots organization working to end U.S. wars and militarism, support peace, environmental protection, and human rights initiatives; as well as redirect taxpayer's money destined for the military sector into areas linked to social development.

Co-founder of the organization, Medea Benjamin, highlighted the irony of the U.S. State Department's attempt to create fear by issuing travel warnings on Cuba, when it is one of the safest countries in the region, and given the level of violence and death in the U.S. as a result of the right to bear arms.

When we get back we will talk about our experience here in Cuba and recommend that people visit the island, not only to meet with solidary people but also to get to know a country with a very interesting culture and way of life, she noted, going on to emphasize the high level of safety on the island.

The CODEPINK co-founder went on to note that much work remains to be done to raise awareness around the issue of war; especially at such a complicated time for the country, with many domestic matters to resolve. In this sense she noted that the organization is working to build alliances with other progressive groups, above all those struggling to end police violence against African-Americans and people of color, immigrant rights move-ments, and environmentalists.

Madea stated that 50 years after the unjust blockade was imposed on Cuba, she never imagined she would still be struggling to bring an end to the immoral and irrational policy, which has been condemned by international organizations such as the UN and the Vatican.

Only the U.S. oligarchy and Cuban-American mafia groups are interested in maintaining the policy; and President Trump announced a reversal in bilateral dip-lomatic relations to appease these individuals, but firm opposition from the U.S. public, who condemn this hostility, has prevented him from implementing new laws, she ex-plain-ed.

The activist also noted that the results of surveys conducted by renowned U.S. institutions show that the vast majority of citizens support normal relations with Cuba and want to be able to freely visit the Caribbean island.

It's our job to continue educating people by showing them that the blockade remains in effect, and negatively impacts both Cuban and U.S. citizens, she noted.

Meanwhile, young journalist Eleonor Goldfield, visiting Cuba for the first time, stated that she wanted to gather and share information about the island, noting that the mass media in the U.S. hide and distort information about the Caribbean island to create a negative image of the country among the general public.



**Members of the CODEPINK delegation during an encounter with the Cuban press.**

Meanwhile, 16-year-old high school student Charlotte Guyot had a similar experience whilst walking around Old Havana one evening. She explained that on being approached by a restaurant promoter, she was frightened at first as ever since she was a young girl, she had been taught not to trust strangers. Today, I think that this idea is wrong and believe that you should trust in people until they give you a reason not to, she explained.

The young student also noted that most of her friends know little about Cuba and tried to dissuade her from visiting the island. However, she decided to travel to the island to get to know the country and intends to tell her classmates about her experience when she returns.

Meanwhile her mother, Jadie Sarda, noted that she was happy her daughter wanted to join the trip as a member of CODEPINK, stating that the last time she visited the island Cubans were excited and pleased about the opening up of diplomatic relations with the U.S. I'm for the normalization of relations between the two countries and it's down to me to motivate other U.S. citizens to demand ongoing ad-equate exchanges, she noted. •

Nuria Barbosa León

Photos: Courtesy of the interviewee

• CUBAN neurosurgeon Norbery Jorge Rodríguez de La Paz is currently providing medical care to the population of the Mexican state of Oaxaca, severely affected by an earthquake in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region September 7, leaving more than 300 dead.

The Cuban doctor is working in the field hospital located in the Che-Nita sports center, as part of a brigade of the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specializing in Disasters and Serious Epidemics, with experience working in twenty countries.

The brigade is composed of 40 doctors, nurses, technicians and service personnel, including cooks and maintenance workers for the hospital's power plant, all living in tents. The medical personnel provide consultations from eight in the morning until there are no more patients waiting to be seen. They also receive emergency cases 24 hours a day.

Dr. Rodríguez previously traveled to help earthquake victims in Nepal, in May 2015. Working there for three months, he noted that the task was particularly difficult given the language barrier. "There we operated both on those wounded due to the disaster, and others who had not been treated due to a lack of professionals dedicated to this specialty in the country. Dr. Orestes López and I operated on more than 30 patients with spinal and cranial disorders," he explained in an exclusive interview with **Granma International**.

Rodríguez, who works at the Institute of Neurology and Neurosurgery in Havana,



**Dr. Norbery Jorge Rodríguez de La Paz (left) performing complex surgery on a Mexican patient.**

noted: "In the case of Mexico, we have already diagnosed five pituitary tumors, malignant lesions of the head, and other traumatic lesions of the spine. We have coordinated with nearby hospitals to operate on these patients and treat their conditions."

The doctor described the local people as being of very scarce means, and noted that they constantly express their gratitude for the Cuban medical aid.

He recalled the surgery conducted on a soldier who had been rescuing earthquake victims, who arrived with a depressed skull fracture. The presence of the medical brigade prevented the patient from having to travel for 13 hours to the Mexican capital, which would have presented a high risk to his life due to infection of the central nervous system. The operation was performed with the few tools they had available and limited technical resources.

Likewise, they operated on a woman with a deforming cystic tumor. Doctors believe that

it grew gradually inside the patient's head for some 30 years, without receiving any specialized professional follow-up care. The patient is currently very well and her relatives have expressed their gratitude for such a feat.

Despite the fact that aftershocks continue to occur in the area, the most difficult part of these internationalist missions for Dr. Rodríguez is being separated from his family, especially his sons Diego and David, aged 14 and three, respectively.

In a visit to his home in Havana, his wife Diana Fernández Calderón noted that her husband has a difficult profession; he leaves the house very early and returns late at night. Meanwhile, Diana is assistant director of the Lizt Alfonso Dance Cuba company, meaning she too has frequent international commitments. As such, the children's maternal grandparents have become surrogate parents: "I have to really thank my parents who help me all the time," she stressed.

She added, "The departure of a member of the family is very difficult, because those who remain in Cuba worry about the absent person. We are a close-knit family, the two children have different mothers but they love each other with devotion. The youngest loves playing with his older brother and misses his dad very much. Father and baby make a game of daily tasks such as bathing, eating, sleeping and walking."

For Diana, living with a neurosurgeon is a great sacrifice but at the same time a source of pride, as he cures illnesses and saves lives. "It is very comforting to see people's affection toward him. Patients and their relatives always think of him on Doctor's Day or on Father's Day. They call him and congratulate him on important

dates," she noted.

Diego explained that he intends to study medicine and wants to become a neurosurgeon just like his father. He is aware of the rigor of the career and aims to obtain high academic results to fulfill his dream. He noted: "My dad is my idol and my source of inspiration to study; I want to imitate him in his profession. I have seen how people profess a lot of affection for the work he does. I would also like to be in a place where I could help others and feel that I have done important work."

"My dad's departure to Mexico," Diego explained, "occurred at the end of September, he didn't have time for a farewell and we only speak by phone. He tells me that he feels a great sadness to see the devastation caused by the earthquake and to learn of the number of deaths that have occurred. They live in tents put up in the grounds of a sports center, and feel the earth shake as a result of the aftershocks. They have also suffered strong winds that almost destroyed their tents. Very early in the morning there are patients to attend to and he has had to perform several complex surgeries without optimal conditions."

Such testimonies remind one of the words of the historic leader of the Revolution Fidel Castro when the Henry Reeve Contingent was founded on September 19, 2005: "Our concepts about the human condition of other peoples and the duty of brotherhood and solidarity have never been nor will be betrayed. Tens of thousands of Cuban doctors and health professionals scattered around the world are irrefutable proof of what I say. For them there will never be language barriers, sacrifice, dangers or obstacles." •