

UN Human Rights Council slams Cuba for rights violations at its Universal Periodic Review

Cuba praised for health care system, slammed on media rights, ignoring the Rome Statute, prisons, torture, political prisoners, the death penalty, Paris Principles, and more.

By Edward Campbell

Missoula, Feb. 6 (Al-Masakin)—The Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review Working Group reviewed the fulfillment of human rights obligations by Cuba Feb. 5, during which 60 Council members and observers raised a number of issues pertaining to the human rights situation in the country.

Cuban Minister of Justice Maria Esther Reus Gonzales presented the National Report on Human Rights at UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review in Geneva on Thursday. The Justice Minister noted that the UPR for Cuba coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the Cuban revolution which made it possible to eradicate the structural injustices inherited from the colonial and neo-colonial period of domination which the country suffered from until 1959.

Issues and questions raised by the Working Group, comprised of the 47 members of the Council, and Observers participating in the interactive discussion related, among other things, the time frame for ratification of the



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); legal safeguards to ensure protection of human rights defenders; the provision of human rights education in the school system; the intention of the State to abolish the death penalty; the intention of the State to extend a standing invitation to United Nations Special Procedures; information on the program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS;

plans to strengthen the independent of the judiciary; and plans to address the issue of sexual exploitation of women and girls.

A large number of delegations made comments about the effects of the US embargo on Cuba, which was in place for nearly 50 years, and its impact on the realization of human rights in Cuba.

Members States taking the floor during the interactive discussion were the Russian Federation, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, China, South Africa, Malaysia, Qatar, India, Jordan, Pakistan, Canada, France, the Philippines, Chile, Switzerland, Bahrain, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Djibouti, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Italy, the Netherlands and Ukraine.

Observer States participating in the discussion were Algeria, Israel, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Lao People’s



Democratic Republic, Venezuela, Bhutan, Iran, Libya, Sri Lanka, Panama, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Jamaica, Belarus, Serbia, Yemen, Vietnam, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Uzbekistan, Austria, Syria, Palestine, Sudan, Senegal, Honduras, Thailand, Côte d'Ivoire and the Czech Republic.

A number of delegations also posed specific recommendations.

- I. The majority of the delegations encouraged Cuba to share its international cooperation experiences with respect to health care, praised Cuba's health care system.
- II. Several delegations encouraged Cuba to live up to its Millennium Development Goals (MGDs), including the basic right to food.
- III. The island state was also encouraged to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC); to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; to ratify the International Convention on economic, social and cultural rights; and to abolish the death penalty; to extend a standing invitation to the United Nations Special Procedures; to give importance to human rights training for government officials at all levels; to give access to its prisons by independent organizations like the

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); to establish a recurrent system of review of its prisons by the United Nations or other relevant international observers; to ensure the right to equality before the courts and tribunals, and to a fair trial; and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

- IV. Cuba was also encouraged to enhance human rights education through public awareness campaigns; to lift restrictions on rights on the freedom of expression and show greater tolerance for Cubans to express opposing views peacefully; to release all remaining political prisoners and to reintegrate them into the community; to guarantee that independent journalists, human rights defenders and political dissidents had the possibility to exercise their basic freedoms without the risk of harassment, intimidation or persecution; and to refrain from using such laws such as dangerousness, enemy propaganda and contempt for authority to restrict the rights of freedom of expression and association.
- V. States recommended that Cuba continue programs aimed at ensuring the human rights of disabled persons; continue programs for the rights of the elderly; consider

ratifying the Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and All Members of Their Families; address the root causes of prostitution by adopting measures enhancing women's economic opportunities; to continue its best practices on gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels; take the necessary measures to combat sexual exploitation by adopting legislation providing legal protection for victims of such acts, especially children; and strengthen national capacities to assist victims of domestic violence.

- VI. To continue efforts aimed at ensuring respect for freedom of conscience and belief for all Cubans; to protect and protect cultural rights; to continue its policy of tolerance and respect towards all religions without any distinction; to promote the active participation of civil society in the follow up to the UPR; to develop and implement an inter-agency mechanism with participation of civil society; to create a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles; to continue its commitment to support initiatives in favour of the right of peoples to self-determination, as well as in its consistent support for all efforts aiming at putting an end to all types of foreign

occupation; and to share experiences and best practices in preparedness to prevent and mitigate the impacts of hurricanes and other natural disasters.

The UPR Working Group is scheduled to adopt the report of Cuba on Monday, 9 February. The Human Rights Council began its review of the human rights record for Saudi Arabia today Feb. 6, and is expected to adopt councils report on human rights in Russian Federation this afternoon.

The chair for the United States has remained empty throughout the review process. Acting spokesman for the U.S. State Department said yesterday that the United States has not decided whether or not to support the Council. The human rights record of the United States will not be up for review by the Human Rights Council until the Council's ninth session in 2010.

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