



Australia-Cuba Friendship Society
Melbourne NEWSLETTER
July 2018

Next Meeting
Monday
2nd July
7.30pm
Unitarian Church
110 Grey St,
East Melbourne

Melbourne	Sydney	Perth	Brisbane	Canberra	Hobart	Adelaide	Central Coast	NSW/Vic Sthn Border	New Zealand
PO Box 1051 Collingwood Vic. 3066	PO Box k364 Haymarket NSW 1240	PO Box 1455 South Perth WA 6951	PO Box 5683 West End Qld 4101	PO Box 6139 Kingston ACT 2604	GPO Box 323 Hobart Tas. 7001	Box 381 N. Adelaide SA 5006	PO Box 1082 Gosford NSW 2250	PO Box 854 Albury NSW 2640	220a Adelaide Rd Newtown Wellington New Zealand

June 24, 2018

Hello everyone. Hope you're all OK. I'm back from my overseas travels, mainly to the UK and Morocco, which was magnificent, with Casablanca a reminder of Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's iconic film. But after leaving Oz, my Brunei stopover almost brought me undone. Walking back to my hotel after eating out, I got caught in a sudden, very violent tropical rainstorm. It was pitch dark minus street lights or footpaths or any human presence and the roads were awash when I went for a sixer. Next day a clinic doctor (84 not out who lurched in on a walking stick) assured me nothing was broken so on I went, arriving in London looking as if I'd been in a pub brawl. But kept on regardless. On my return, I spent one night in Brunei and struck Ramadan on steroids. Nothing was open, including all eating houses, with officials doing the rounds making sure they obeyed the law. And then flew in to a wet, cold Melbourne at 5am and back to listening to the fascist drivel emanating from the mouths of Turnbull and his moronic cronies celebrating tax cuts for the rich, topped off by support from its peak body to flog off the ABC. And then the disgraceful announcement that Telstra's chief is sacking thousands of its workers to satisfy tax-avoiding shareholders. Help!

In London, I walked past a silent Ecuadorian Embassy where Julian Assange is still holed up. Another national disgrace. Our government has a diplomatic and moral obligation to bring him home. Fat chance, even though Assange has committed no crime. **'...a smokescreen, behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for daring to tell the public their secret plans for wars and occupations,'** said John Pilger. In 2008 a plot to destroy both WikiLeaks and Assange was spelled out in a top secret document written by a branch of the US Defence Department recommending a campaign of smears and lies by the mainstream media. 'Vichy journalists', said

John Pilger, named for the Vichy government that worked with the German occupation in wartime France. And our mob are part of it, including our once vibrant ABC, with savage cut-backs and ideological cave-ins cutting out its heart. With much fanfare, Sarah Ferguson took over 'Four Corners', and has become notable for her anti-communism and her fawning interview with Hillary Clinton, when she invited Clinton to describe the personal damage Assange had done to her, which she did in spades without giving Assange the right of reply. Not one question about the Clinton foundation she shares with husband Bill which received millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, major backers of ISIS and other terrorist groups across the Middle East, nor as Secretary of State her approval of the huge arms sale - \$80 billion - to Saudi Arabia, weapons currently being used to crush the people of Yemen. When the late British playwright Harold Pinter accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature he slammed the media for spreading **'a vast tapestry of lies on which we feed...America's crimes 'never happened'...even while they were happening, they never happened.'** Like Israel, entrenching apartheid rule over Palestinians and getting away with it, while the world looks the other way.

Ever since the internet entered our lives we've been warned that it's bad for us, that cyberspace was a parallel universe that could swallow us whole. It started in the 1960s when Silicon Valley was a mere handful of electronics firms clustered among fruit orchards and computers were large, expensive and hard to use. But during the 1970s, experiments in Northern California solved the problem, giving digital technology a friendlier face. No-one contributed more to this transformation than Steve Jobs by launching the Macintosh in the mid-80s followed by the mass smart phone and iPhone. Today we are surrounded by a wilderness of screens

where digital devices chase every last moment of our attention and where a small rich elite holds humanity in its grubby hands. But the faith is faltering. Tech insiders are finally admitting their mistakes, apologising for the trolls, the scams, the fake news and especially sorry for our scrambled brains, for the 'unintended consequences' of the platforms they helped to create. **'God only knows what it's doing to our children', said the engineer who helped build Facebook's "like" button.'** Indeed.

Stating the obvious, the world is in a hell of a mess. The West led by the US is flexing its muscle, snapping in all directions, provoking, antagonising and directly attacking countries from China to Russia. While not officially called fascism, that's what it is. Countries that refused to be cowed were flattened, like Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq while others were overthrown by direct and indirect interventions, with Venezuela and Syria currently on the front line. 'Here, no-one surrenders', said Hugo Chavez in 2011, under treatment for cancer which many believe was administered by the US. Chavez was warned by Fidel Castro, the target of hundreds of failed and often bizarre assassination plots: **'...these people have developed the technology to kill without leaving a trace...take care what you eat...'**

While I was in London, I revisited the grave of Karl Marx wondering what he would say about today's world. **'Workers of all lands unite'** reads his tombstone, the solidarity of the exploited. With Engels he foresaw how humans would be turned into exploitable assets where buying and selling would become an obsession. I shop therefore I am. Instead of uniting to end capitalism, we buy more 'things' propping up a degraded system. **'The philosophers',** wrote Marx, words also emblazoned on his tombstone **'have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.'**

Joan Coxsedge, Commentator-in-Chief, Melbourne ACFS (03) 9857 9249

[A patriotic, renovated El Cobre greets Díaz-Canel](#)

The Cuban President appreciated the social transformations evident in the town and continued his tour of Santiago de Cuba with stops at sites of economic importance



[Díaz-Canel begins visit to Santiago de Cuba \(+Photos\)](#)

The President of the Councils of State and Ministers, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, began a visit to Santiago de Cuba this Wednesday, where he will tour sites of social, economic and historical interest



[Excellent relations between Cuba and Russia confirmed](#)



Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz met Russian Senator Sergei V. Kalashnikov last week and highlighted Russian support of the project underway to restore the Cuban Capitol's dome

[A visit to the birthplace of the Revolution \(+Photos\)](#)

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez, President of Cuba's Councils of State and Ministers began a tour of Santiago de Cuba, yesterday June 20, including several sites of historic, economic, and social interest

- **[Díaz-Canel begins visit to Santiago de Cuba \(+Photos\)](#)**



[On the path of innovation](#)

Granma International interviews the director of Cuba's pharmaceutical state enterprise group, BioCubaFarma, about the supply of medicine and investments underway

[Cuba's exemplary biotechnology research](#)

The state enterprise group BioCubaFarma has 393 research projects underway, of which 102 involve biotechnology



[Vilma's struggles more necessary than ever](#)

The Federation of Cuban Women remembered Vilma Espín yesterday, June 18, 11 years after her death, and 25 since she participated in the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna



[“Deafness” that reaches the other side of the world](#)



The story of alleged sonic attacks on U.S. diplomats accredited in foreign countries has been repeated

Cuba will continue to build an ever freer, more democratic, just, and fraternal society

Statement by Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, during the presentation of Cuba's National Report to the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council. Geneva, May 16, 2018. (Unofficial version from www.minrex.gob.cu)

Author: MINREX | internet@granma.cu, may 16, 2018 11:05:37

Mr. President:

Once again, Cuba attends the Universal Periodic Review to ratify its firm commitment with the guarantees for the exercise of human rights.

The national report that we are presenting is the result of a broad and participatory process of consultations which involved numerous government institutions and civil society organizations, as well as the implementation of the recommendations accepted during the second review -79 per cent of all the recommendations that were formulated.

Mr. President:

From the times of the US military occupation, which severed our independence, under the governments it imposed, 45 per cent of children did not attend schools; 85 per cent of persons lacked running water; farmers lived in abject poverty without ever owning the land they tilled and immigrants were brutally exploited.

In Cuba, workers and farmers had no rights. Extrajudicial execution, enforced disappearances and torture were recurrent. Discrimination based on the color of the skin was brutal; poverty was rampant and women and girls were even more excluded. The dignity of Cubans was tarnished and Cuba's national culture was trampled upon.

The Cuban Revolution led by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz transformed that reality and continues to strive to improve the quality of life, wellbeing and social justice for all of our people, thus implementing all human rights.

That willingness to protect human dignity, provide equal opportunities and "conquer all the justice", has remained unchanged and unswerving until today.

Mr. President:

Our country has continued to take steps to further improve its economic and social development model with the purpose of building a sovereign, independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation by strengthening the institutional structure of our political system, which is genuinely participatory and enjoys full popular support.

In accordance with the Constitution, we have continued to strengthen the legal and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of those rights, and we have introduced modifications and proposals adapted to the needs and realities of the Cuban society and international standards.

The attention to citizens has been equally improved by means of the expansion of the mechanisms, ways and recourses in the hands of the population to denounce any infringement of the legal system or their rights; file claims or petitions to the competent authorities; channel up their opinions and concerns and actively participate in the adoption of government decisions.

Mr. President:

The protection of the right to life has continued to be the highest priority. This is ensured by recognizing the right to physical integrity and inviolability of persons; observing the guarantees of the due process and preventing anyone from being deprived of freedom except under the law and with full guarantees.

Law enforcement authorities fulfill their duty in accordance with the

law and are subject to rigorous control processes and popular scrutiny. There has been no impunity in the very few cases of abuses involving law enforcement agents and officials; and there are no laws or rules that could condone it.

There is no sale or traffic in firearms. Homicides rates are very low, which makes Cuba one of the safest countries in the world.

Mr. President:

Cuba has continued to strengthen people's participation in government decision making and the exercise of the freedoms recognized under the Constitution and the law, including the civil and political rights that are fully protected. In the country there is an extensive plurality of ideas and there is a rich debate about the most diverse aspects of the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation

More than 1.6 million Cubans participated in the process of consultation of the documents on the Conceptualization of Cuba's Economic and Social Model for Socialist Development and the Fundamentals for the National Economic and Social Development Plan by the Year 2030. More than 500 000 of them were young people. A total of 208 161 proposals of modifications were made, which generated changes of a considerable part of the original text.

In Cuba, the democratic exercise is a continued process that is based on our democracy model, which has been legitimately established and is also participatory and popular.

The right to participate in the conduction of public affairs is not limited to electoral processes. It is permanently exercised in the different walks of the political, economic and social life of the nation.

We have continued to increase the effectiveness of the control exercised by all citizens over the activity of state organs, elected representatives and public officials.

Our electoral processes are not media contests among elitist political parties in which candidates make promises they do not keep; where division, hatred, lies and corruption are promoted; where technologies are used to manipulate the will of voters; or the ethical behavior of contestants is sacrificed for the sake of having an electoral edge.

Elected representatives in Cuba do not earn a salary for that; nor are they committed to big companies and donors. Under Cuba's democratic system, there is no room for money, demagoguery and publicity.

There is not a unique democracy model or a pre-established or agreed formula on this concept. As established in Article 8 of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of 1993, "democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives".

This is also established in Item 5 of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by the Heads of State and Government in 2014 in Havana.

Elections in Cuba are held periodically and in absolute freedom and normalcy, in accordance with our electoral law, and are characterized by keeping automatic and public registries; people are entitled to appoint candidates and there are high turnout levels in a climate



of absolute tranquility.

At the recently concluded election of deputies to the National People's Power Assembly, 86 per cent of voters cast their vote and 94 per cent of ballots were rendered valid. These results, which are not achieved in countries portrayed as ideal democracy models, show the high level of legitimacy and popular support enjoyed by the Cuban political system.

The Cuban society is represented in the National Assembly in all its diversity. Its seats are occupied by workers and farmers; intellectuals and artists; students and youths; all sectors of the economy, production and services, including the non-state sector; athletes and scientists; the workers of the media; religious institutions; as well as the armed forces and law enforcement institutions.

Fifty three per cent of deputies are women and 41 per cent are black and mulatto, which is a reflection of the composition of the Cuban nation. The average age is 49 years and 13 per cent is between 18 and 35 years of age. This will be the first mandate for 56 per cent of elected deputies.

We have continued advancing in the promotion of the right to full equality; in the struggle against elements of discrimination based on the color of the skin and against women, which are still present in the behavior of some persons. This is a permanent goal that we will continue to pursue non-stop and without setbacks.

Progress has also been made, with the support of government institutions, to prevent and cope with manifestations of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The programs aimed at the care and protection of children and youths; older persons and persons with disabilities, as empowered actors, subjects of law and beneficiaries of national development, are being strengthened.

Mr. President:

Cuba's civil society consolidates as an ever more important actor in the national scene. The number of associations in Cuba increase; they currently account for more than 2 200 organizations. Civil society organizations are ensured ample attributions and proactive capabilities, as well as facilities for making consultations, expressing their opinions and participating in decision making processes associated to the design, implementation and evaluation of programs of great social impact as well as in the identification of the remaining challenges.

Guarantees for the exercise of human rights are a priority obligation of the State. In Cuba, every sphere of social life counts on thousands of defenders of these rights, whose work enjoys recognition and government support.

However, as it occurs in many other countries where the rule of law prevails, in Cuba, the legal system cannot be infringed upon or subverted to satisfy a foreign agenda that calls for a change of regime, the constitutional order and the political system that Cubans have freely chosen. Those who act this way are not worthy of being described as human rights defenders; they rather qualify as agents to the service of a foreign power, according to many western legislations.

Mr. President:

Cuba has continued to strengthen its cooperation with the UN mechanisms that take care of these issues, which are universal and non-discriminatory. We have strictly complied with all international commitments and obligations entered into by virtue of these.

We are party to 44 of the 61 international human rights instruments, which makes our country to be among the States with higher levels of ratifications.

Our country has made great efforts to honor its commitments with human rights treaty bodies, with which it has managed to consolidate a positive dialogue.

Since the former UPR, we have defended periodic reviews before the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the initial

report before the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. This August, we will defend a periodic report before the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and in 2019 we will defend the initial report before the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In April and July of 2017 respectively, we received the visits of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity.

The first had the opportunity to corroborate the results achieved by Cuba in the implementation of the national "zero tolerance" policy with regards to this type of crime, which has a low incidence in our country; and receive information about the National Program of Action for the prevention and struggle against trafficking in persons and the protection of victims, adopted during the early days of 2017. The Independent Expert on International Solidarity was able to assess the results of the program of international cooperation established by Cuba to support the enjoyment of human rights in other developing countries.

Mr. President:

Cuba has continued to promote initiatives at the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, for the defense of human rights, including the rights to development and peace. We have consistently opposed every attempt to politically manipulate said bodies; selectivity as well as double standards.

We have consolidated our cooperation with humanitarian and human rights organizations of the whole world. Every year we are visited by high authorities of the United Nations, its funds, programs and specialized agencies, as well as by representatives of non-governmental organizations.

In November of 2015 and February of 2018 respectively we received the working visits of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Secretary General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

Mr. President:

Despite the achievements attained by Cuba in terms of the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights, we have certain dissatisfactions, but we are striving to solve our difficulties. Our people, who have made the greatest sacrifices and run the highest risks to preserve its sovereignty, deserve efficient institutions to improve the wellbeing and quality of life and promote social justice for all.

We are aware of the difficulties and deficiencies in the life of our compatriots. As was pointed out by the then President Raúl Castro Ruz in December last: "In this period, efforts have been reinforced and intensified with greater comprehensiveness and scope, such that we are capable of, at the same time that we unify the currency system, overcoming the existing distortions in terms of subsidies, prices, and wholesale and retail rates and, as is logical, pensions and salaries in the state sector of the economy."

Likewise, huge efforts are being made, amid adverse financial conditions, to preserve the purchasing power of salaries and pensions, improve access to food, adequate housing and public transportation, while preserving and even enhancing the quality of universal and free education and public health. No one will ever be left to his or her own fate in Cuba.

We cannot but mention our condition as a small island developing country, faced with an unfavorable international economic situation, characterized by the prevalence of irrational and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; market regulations and non transparent and less than democratic international financial institutions. Added to this are the adverse effects of climate change and the impact of natural disasters of high intensity on our economy. Substantial resources should be invested to cope with them.

Our future priorities are to continue working on the updating of the economic and social development model; the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of

human rights; the improvement of our political system and the Cuban socialist democracy model; and the defense of our values, national unity and independence.

In pursuing these goals, we will soon engage in a process to reform our Constitution, which will be characterized by a broad popular participation.

Mr. President:

The strengthening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba and its extraterritorial implementation causes deprivations and continue to be the main obstacle to the economic and social development of the country. This unjust policy, which has been rejected by the international community, violates the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and International Law and represents a flagrant, massive and systematic violation of the human rights of our people, thus qualifying as an act of genocide under the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948.

We demand the return of the territory usurped by the US Naval Base in Guantánamo, where the United States maintains a detention camp in which serious human rights violations and acts of torture are committed.

The political and media campaigns against Cuba, which distort our

reality, intend to discredit our country and conceal Cuba's undeniable human rights achievements.

Mr. President:

Cuba will continue to move forward, firmly and reassured, with the political will and determination of the Cuban people and government, to build an ever freer, more democratic, participatory just and fraternal society.

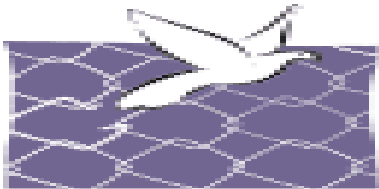
We are opened to dialogue and will offer all the necessary information based on the respect and objectivity that should characterize this exercise, in which there should be no double standards or politically motivated manipulations, which we will not accept, because, as was expressed by the President of the Council of State and Ministers, Comrade Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez on April 19, "there is no room for a transition that ignores or destroys the legacy of so many years of struggle. In Cuba, by the decision of the people, there is only room for the continuity of that legacy with the Revolution and the founding generation, without giving up to pressures, without fear and setbacks, always defending our truths and reasons, without ever renouncing sovereignty and independence, development programs and our own dreams."

Thank you, very much.
(Cubaminrex)

Anything from the list below you can bring to the ACFS monthly meeting is greatly appreciated.

Food and Household Items

- healthy breakfast cereals
- dried fruit, nuts & seeds
- flatbread
- long life (UHT) milk
- healthy snack foods
- tomato paste
- tinned sardines and salmon
- tinned tomato, corn and peas
- tinned beans and lentils (without sauce)
- green tea, black tea & instant coffee
- spices
- honey (in small jars)
- dishwashing detergent
- shaving items
- sanitary pads
- shampoo
- soap
- toothbrushes
- washing powder



asrc Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

People Feeding People

These are some practical ways you can help support families seeking asylum, who are living below the poverty line.

1. Become a [food sponsor](#)
2. Order a Foodbank 'home delivery' through [Coles Online](#)
3. Donate toilet paper online via [Who Gives a Crap](#).

The centre in Footscray is extremely grateful for items already donated by ACFS.



Vale Elizabeth Kourtis

Elizabeth Kourtis passed away on the 9th of January in Moe aged 86. Elizabeth was a long-time volunteer at 3CR and worked as the stations listener sponsor coordinator, reception volunteer and programmer, presenting the program *Calling all Women*, one of the very early programs on the 3CR grid, on-air until Elizabeth's retirement in 2011. Elizabeth was a member of the Union of Australian Women, the Australian USSR friendship society and the Australian Bulgarian friendship society making a lasting contribution to the politics of these organisations and the politics and programming at 3CR. Through her work with the Australian USSR friendship society Elizabeth organised a significant financial contribution to the station, funds that will go towards replacing our roof. Over her many years as a volunteer and member of 3CR, Elizabeth's contributions to our organisation made her a valued and important member of the 3CR community. Our sincere condolences to her family and her many friends and comrades within 3CR and Melbourne ACFS

Education in Cuba & the 2030 Agenda

For quality, equitable education

Author: [Yenia Silva Correa](#) | informacion@granma.cu - june 15, 2018 14:06:45



There is no doubt that education occupies a key place in the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and is vital to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

For a country such as Cuba, where education (free, mandatory, and universal) is a fundamental pillar of its social system, and which has sent its teachers and professors to offer solidary help to peoples across the world, issues like illiteracy and access to schooling have not been a problem since the early days of the Revolution.

“Cuba has been making progress toward achieving all the (2030 education) goals,” according to Dr. Margarita McPherson Sayú, deputy minister of Education, “We have already achieved many goals from a quantitative and contextual point of view, and must therefore work harder to raise the quality of education.”

Education is present, in one way or another, in each one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and is a vital tool to ensuring that these are fulfilled at a global level.

Milestones in Cuban education post-1959

- 1961: National literacy campaign. Illiteracy drops to 3.9% after 707,000 people learn to read and write.
- 1975: First cycle of educational reform.
- 1987: Second cycle of educational reform.
- 2000: Launch of television program **University for all**, with educational courses for the entire population.
- 2001: Dr. Leonela Relys creates the Yo sí puedo (Yes, I can) literacy method. From 2002 to 2016, 10 million people from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Oceania and Europe learned to read and write through the program.
- 2011: Third cycle of educational reform.
- 2015: The first smart-classrooms appear in Cuba, equipped with a digital interactive white-board, tablets or laptops, wifi, servers and projectors.

(Sources: *Ecured, Mesa Redonda, Granma, Cubadebate*)

In particular, the fourth objective (which features targets goals) includes new and more demanding tasks for both countries and international organizations.

For the first time, the need to produce relevant and effective results is being voiced in the global discussion on inclusive education. For Cuba this means, “We must modify teaching methods and seek to achieve higher quality and more equitable education,” stated the Deputy Minister.

Within the Cuban system, schooling is obligatory for all children, regardless of gender, starting from early childhood through ninth grade.

This policy falls in line with the 2030 Education goals and is evidence of the political will of the state to provide equitable, quality, respectful, and sustainable education for all. “Our work to ensure that education reflects the true sense of comprehensive training with a broad vision, is very important,” stated Dr. McPherson Sayú.

Immersed in a third cycle of educational reform, the Ministry of Education is focused on

the objectives, substantive processes, and targets in place, while at the same time taking steps to fulfill the SDG.

In this sense the Deputy Minister stated that “With regard to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, we are focusing on four key areas: raising the level of learning; students’ socio-emotional skills; civic and citizenship education; and social inclusion. These are aspects that we must address if we want to work toward achieving these goals.”

Although the deadline for the SDG and 2030 Agenda is 12 years away, the value and importance of knowledge and education mean that all efforts toward improving education on a global scale cannot wait until tomorrow. Teachers worldwide now face the challenge of modifying their work routines - from lesson plans, to ways of transmitting and assessing knowledge. Governments are tasked with creating sustainable and equitable education systems, while it is up to society to put an end to inequality which continues to act as a barrier to development.

Capitalism, Cuba and human rights

Posted in [Cuba, Latin America & The Caribbean](#) - By Cheryl LaBash, May 25, 2018

Scarcely one month apart, the U.S. and Cuba each released a review of human rights.

On April 20, the U.S. State Department released its “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.” This is the U.S. government’s take on human rights in other countries — many of them devastated by U.S.-instigated, regime-change chaos, bombardments or economic sanctions. The report doesn’t mention any of this country’s well-known internal and external human rights violations, pointing only at those in countries it deems foes. The report unsurprisingly singles out Russia, China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Iran.

Cuba submitted to the U.N. a thorough overview on May 16 documenting its advances in, and defense of, human rights. This is Cuba’s third such review since the 2006 formation of the U.N. Human Rights Council’s country-by-country periodic review.

For nearly 60 years, the U.S. has violated the human rights of the Cuban people, including through the ongoing genocidal U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba. Since 1992, the majority of the globe’s countries have opposed this violation of Cuba’s rights through U.N. General Assembly votes. In 2017 the vote was 191 to 2, with only the U.S. and Israel supporting the blockade.

Capitalism promises, socialism delivers

What Cuba’s recent report to the U.N. shows is that socialism, even in an underdeveloped and blockaded country, can deliver what capitalism only promises.

In the report’s introduction Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parilla emphasizes how far Cuba’s socialist revolution has come in just 60 years. He contrasts living conditions today to those endured from 1898 until 1959, the year the Cuban Revolution toppled the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship:

“From the time of the U.S. military occupation, which severed our independence, under the governments it imposed, 45 percent of children did not attend schools; 85 percent of the people lacked running water; farmers lived in abject poverty without ever owning the land they tilled and immigrants were brutally exploited.

“In Cuba, workers and farmers had no rights. Extrajudicial execution, enforced disappearances and torture were recurrent. Discrimination based on the color of the skin was brutal; poverty was rampant; and women and girls were even more excluded. The dignity of Cubans was tarnished and Cuba’s national culture was trampled upon.

“The Cuban Revolution led by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz transformed that reality and continues to strive to improve the quality of life, wellbeing and social justice for all of our people, thus implementing all human rights.

“That willingness to protect human dignity, provide equal opportunities and ‘conquer all the justice’ has remained unchanged and unswerving until today.” (www.minrex.gob.cu)

A look at how human rights are defended and implemented in Cuba reveals how thoroughly U.S. capitalist propaganda trumpets “human rights” as a politically loaded code phrase, usually as a pretext for U.S. domination, intervention and aggression.

The State Department’s report claims that the U.S. “promotes and defends” the inalienable rights with which every person is endowed. However, these rights are defined under capitalist legal systems.

As the great novelist and master of irony Anatole

France once wrote:

“The law, in all its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.” Now, of course, according to the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United ruling, corporations have those “inalienable” rights, too.

Redefining ‘human rights’

In contrast, the recent election of the new Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez demonstrated that an election process without capitalist domination is not only possible, but profoundly democratic.

There was input and institutional representation from all of Cuban society — unions, small farmers, women, students. There were no advertisements or campaign contributions, no special status awarded to those elected. What they receive is extra work at the same pay as their regular job, with accountability to their mobilized constituency.

What about the right to a free education and universal, quality health care or to be secure in your home without fear that a landlord or bank will evict you? Those are not rights under capitalism, where getting so many of life’s necessities depends on the ability to pay, to have to scramble and fight for them.

But free education and universal health care are rights in Cuba, guaranteed and accessed by all — as is the right to vote. There are no gerrymandering or confusing voter registration issues to restrict access to the ballot in Cuba. Everyone is automatically registered when they become 16 years old.

Even after hundreds of years of colonial exploitation and slavery, followed by decades of U.S. domination, Cuba’s human rights achievements in the last 60 years are noteworthy. Yet the Cubans themselves say they are not perfect and have much more to strive for and achieve.

In the report Cuban Foreign Minister Rodriguez Parilla writes: “The strengthening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba, and its extraterritorial implementation, causes deprivations and continues to be the main obstacle to the economic and social development of the country.”

Tragically illustrating his point was the May 18 crash of the Boeing 737 aircraft at Havana’s Jose Marti International Airport. The ongoing U.S. blockade is without a doubt responsible for the loss of the 111 lives.

Because of the blockade, Cuba is barred from directly buying anything made by a U.S. corporation or containing U.S.-owned or made components. To obtain what is needed for national transportation, Cuba must go through third parties to lease aircraft. Not only is this at great additional expense, but it also means that Cuba does not have ultimate control over engineering or safety aspects.

This recent tragedy is yet another example of how the U.S. blockade of Cuba is more than unjust — it is deadly. It’s another reason for people in the U.S. to raise our voices and demand the end of the U.S. blockade.



Havana, Cuba, on May Day.

From G7 to Shanghai summit, U.S. swagger falls flat

Posted in [Asia](#), [Class struggle](#), [Europe](#), [Iran](#), [Korea](#) - By Sara Flounders, June 12, 2018

The response to President Donald Trump's arrogant withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and wild threats of tariffs on U.S. allies has exposed declining U.S. influence on a global scale.

This became all too obvious at the gathering in Quebec, Canada, of the G7 summit of the seven major imperialist powers — United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. With the exception of Japan, the other six countries are also leading members of the U.S.-commanded NATO military alliance.

Trump's insults and contradictory statements before and after the G7 meeting, and his threats of new tariffs unleashing an unpredictable trade war, reinforced the disarray in the global capitalist order that U.S. imperialism has commanded for 70 years.

Washington is increasingly unable to control the global agenda. U.S. corporate power finds it can no longer order the nations of the world to isolate the People's Democratic Republic of Korea or Iran.

The U.S. has less to offer except threats of military destruction, unpayable debt and broken agreements. This untenable situation is the cause of Trump's rants, tweets and temper tantrums.

The June 12 meeting in Singapore of President Kim Jong Un and Trump, and the joint communiqué signed afterwards, was met with great enthusiasm in North and South Korea — and worldwide. But this is hardly based on Trump's skill as a negotiator. Events in Asia are moving far beyond U.S. control.

The images of the two warm meetings of President Moon Jae-in of South Korea and President Kim of the DPRK; President Kim's two meetings with President Xi of China; and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit, which opposed all sanctions, ending the day before Trump arrived in Asia; confirmed that decades of U.S. efforts to isolate DPRK had failed.



Donald Trump at the G7.

G7 – a thieves summit

In past years G7 summits were usually weekend photo ops, with a vague unity statement to paper over deep economic rivalries behind the scenes.

The only agreement among these top officials, who represent the largest bankers and corporations, is about imperialist wars. They agree on the NATO bombing of Libya, the concerted regime change effort in Syria, the expansion of NATO to the borders of Russia, and the effort to pull Ukraine into the NATO military alliance. They agreed to impose harsh sanctions on Russia and expel Russia from what was then the G8 when Russia moved in 2014 to save its only naval port in Crimea from being captured by NATO.

In past decades, the U.S. had great influence in establishing, and steering for its benefit, this gathering of the world's largest imperialist powers. In essence it is a gathering of thieves and robbers in an alliance to loot the developing world through international banking agreements, utilizing the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and imposing starvation sanctions on countries that have stepped out of line. But at the same time, these pirates are also ruthlessly competing with each other.

A different alliance

As one meeting of world leaders of the major imperialist countries ended in Canada, another very different meeting was opening in China. More than 2,500 domestic and foreign reporters and 2,000 guests came to Qingdao, a coastal city in Shandong province, to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit on June 9 and 10. A dozen agreements on economic cooperation and security were signed.

The SCO summit involves eight Asian countries in the developing world. Four of them — China, Russia, India and Pakistan — are large countries. The Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are also members. Several other Asian countries have observer and dialogue partner status. The member countries account for 3 billion people, almost half the world's population.

SCO's newest member, as of this summit, is Iran.

This meeting of global significance has received scant attention in the U.S. media. One headline of CNNMoney, however, summarized the new reality: "Forget the G7. A summit happening in China is what really matters." (June 8)

The SCO is not a revolutionary alliance. Nor is it an international coalition that challenges capitalist property relations or the global order in any fundamental way.

It is an international gathering outside of all imperialist-dominated forums. Many of the member countries are targeted by imperialism and seek mutual assistance and cooperation in order to develop.

Initially established as a regional security grouping, the SCO nations have increasingly focused on expanding trade and strengthening wider cooperation among developing countries.

Plans already underway for vast modernization, the introduction of new industries and advanced communication will lead to a large expansion of the working class throughout the entire region.

China's agenda in hosting the SCO summit is to expand its regional influence and bypass U.S. military encirclement through numerous trade and infrastructure agreements. It now has the nationalized resources and the expertise to help fund large-scale development projects and to upgrade the infrastructure of major roads, railways, ports, pipelines and telecommunications to meet the needs of neighboring countries.

U.S. breaks Iran deal

Trump's May 8 announcement on Iran unraveled an international agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed by seven countries — U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, Iran and the European Union — after years of dire U.S. threats. Although Iran had met every provision of the restrictive treaty, stringent sanctions and harsh new penalties to any country doing business with Iran will be imposed.

France, Germany and Britain, along with the EU, denounced the unilateral action because it blocked their unfolding business deals. In a joint statement, they officially reminded Trump that a U.N. Security Council endorsement had made this a binding international agreement. Despite their opposition to Washington's decision, they began closing down their projects in Iran.

Trump's withdrawal from the Iran agreement is hardly a surprise. From the hundreds of treaties made with Indigenous nations to the Vietnam Peace Treaty, agreements with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia, Washington has never respected or abided by any pact made with oppressed, developing or targeted nations.

But Washington's decision to withdraw from the signed agreement, reimpose sanctions and demand every other country follow suit or face penalties no longer has the impact it did even five years ago.

China's invitation to Iran

China — Iran's number-one energy partner — used Washington's effort to isolate Iran and undercut Wall Street's European rivals by turning the tables.

President Xi Jinping invited Iranian President Hassan Rouhani for a bilateral meeting on trade and cooperation. Jinping also publicly invited Iran to participate in the SCO meeting.

Iran is a key transport hub between Asia and Europe and provides maritime access to landlocked countries. China's proposal for a high-speed railway across Central Asia is advantageous to Iran and to the development of the whole region.

Iran recently signed a free-trade zone agreement with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union.

Russia, Iran and China can trade in the Chinese yuan, now an international currency. This means they can avoid U.S. sanctions on both Iran and Russia, which complicate all U.S. dollar transactions.

Attendance at the SCO

It is significant that both Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and President Mamnoon Hussain of Pakistan attended the SCO summit and shook hands. These two nuclear states have fought three wars against each other. British and U.S. policy for decades was to do everything possible to keep India and Pakistan in hostile contention.

Presidents of four central Asian countries that are former Soviet republics — Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — attended as members. Each country secured very favorable new economic and trade agreements. For example, in return for greater access to regional energy, China offers lesser developed countries like Kazakhstan, the largest world exporter of uranium, access to world markets for its exports as well as increased regional trade among member states.

Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the summit. Russia's economy is much smaller than China's and is growing slowly. But Russia is one of the world's biggest energy producers. It also faces U.S. and EU sanctions.

Qingdao was a symbolic choice to host the SCO summit. It is at the eastern end of a vast railway network across Eurasia and a logistical center linking the Silk Road Economic Belt with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

According to Chinese news reports, this 18th summit is expected to "ratify a five-year outline for the implementation of the Treaty on Long-term Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation," as well as "approve more than 10 cooperation deals covering areas including security, economy, and people-to-people exchanges."

Changing balance

U.S. imperialism's economic domination has declined dramatically. So has the economic weight of the EU countries.

In contrast, the Asia Pacific region's share of the global economy is expected to rise to 39 percent by 2023, while that of North America is estimated to fall to 25 percent, according to the IMF.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that the other G7 members wouldn't "mind signing a six-country agreement if need be." The six other G7 countries now form a larger market than the U.S. market.

But, as Putin pointed out, the combined purchasing power of the SCO now outstrips that of the G7.

News reports and commentaries at the SCO focused on this new alliance challenging the existing world order led by the U.S.

All of this will have an impact on Trump's talks with the DPRK. Trump faces a common determination to not allow U.S. threats or sanctions to isolate any country or destabilize whole regions.

Pentagon threatens all progress

The Pentagon's response to the historic SCO gathering was to send U.S. B-52 bombers on maneuvers in the South China Sea on June 5. Earlier, on May 27, two warships sailed near the South China Sea islands claimed by China. China denounced U.S. militarization of the region and its willful trespassing as highly provocative.

While fighting among themselves at the G7 meeting, both Britain and France agreed to have their warships join the aggressive U.S. naval operation, labeled the "Freedom of Navigation Flotilla," in the world's most important shipping corridor.

It is hardly a coincidence that the announcement among these imperialist pirates was made in Singapore days ahead of Trump's meeting with President Kim Jong un of the DPRK.

This old-fashioned gunboat diplomacy can't stop the people of the world from pursuing development and communication.

Flounders is co-coordinator of the International Action Center.

THE URGENCY OF BRINGING JULIAN ASSANGE HOME

18 June 2018

The persecution of Julian Assange must end. Or it will end in tragedy.

The Australian government and prime minister Malcolm Turnbull have an historic opportunity to decide which it will be.

They can remain silent, for which history will be unforgiving. Or they can act in the interests of justice and humanity and bring this remarkable Australian citizen home.

Assange does not ask for special treatment. The government has clear diplomatic and moral obligations to protect Australian citizens abroad from gross injustice: in Julian's case, from a gross miscarriage of justice and the extreme danger that await him should he walk out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London unprotected.

We know from the Chelsea Manning case what he can expect if a US extradition warrant is successful - a United Nations Special Rapporteur called it torture.

I know Julian Assange well; I regard him as a close friend, a person of extraordinary resilience and courage. I have watched a tsunami of lies and smear engulf him, endlessly, vindictively, perfidiously; and I know why they smear him.

In 2008, a plan to destroy both WikiLeaks and Assange was laid out in a top secret document dated 8 March, 2008. The authors were the Cyber Counter-intelligence Assessments Branch of the US Defence Department. They described in detail how important it was to destroy the "feeling of trust" that is WikiLeaks' "centre of gravity".

This would be achieved, they wrote, with threats of "exposure [and] criminal prosecution" and a unrelenting assault on reputation. The aim was to silence and criminalise WikiLeaks and its editor and publisher. It was as if they planned a war on a single human being and on the very principle of freedom of speech.

Their main weapon would be personal smear. Their shock troops would be enlisted in the media - those who are meant to keep the record straight and tell us the truth.

The irony is that no one told these journalists what to do. I call them Vichy journalists - after the Vichy government that served and enabled the German occupation of wartime France.

Last October, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation journalist Sarah Ferguson interviewed Hillary Clinton, over whom she fawned as "the icon for your generation".

This was the same Clinton who threatened to "obliterate totally" Iran and, who, as US secretary of State in 2011, was one of the instigators of the invasion and destruction of Libya as a modern state, with the loss of 40,000 lives. Like the invasion of Iraq, it was based on lies.

When the Libyan President was murdered publicly and gruesomely with a knife, Clinton was filmed whooping and cheering. Thanks largely to her, Libya became a breeding ground for ISIS and other jihadists. Thanks largely to her, tens of thousands of refugees fled in peril across the Mediterranean, and many drowned.

Leaked emails published by WikiLeaks revealed that Hillary Clinton's foundation - which she shares with her husband - received millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the main backers of ISIS and terrorism across the Middle East.

As Secretary of State, Clinton approved the biggest arms sale ever - worth \$80 billion - to Saudi Arabia, one of her foundation's principal benefactors. Today, Saudi Arabia is using these weapons to crush starving and stricken people in a genocidal assault on Yemen.

Sarah Ferguson, a highly paid reporter, raised not a word of this with Hillary Clinton sitting in front of her.

Instead, she invited Clinton to describe the "damage" Julian Assange did "personally to you". In response, Clinton defamed Assange, an Australian citizen, as "very clearly a tool of Russian intelligence" and "a nihilistic opportunist who does the bidding of a dictator".

She offered no evidence - nor was asked for any - to back her grave allegations.

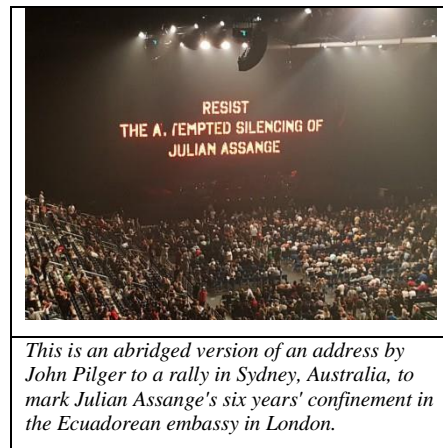
At no time was Assange offered the right of reply to this shocking interview, which Australia's publicly-funded state broadcaster had a duty to give him.

As if that wasn't enough, Ferguson's executive producer, Sally Neighbour, followed the interview with a vicious re-tweet: "Assange is Putin's bitch. We all know it!"

There are many other examples of Vichy journalism. The Guardian, reputedly once a great liberal newspaper, conducted a vendetta against Julian Assange. Like a spurned lover, the Guardian aimed its personal, petty, inhuman and craven attacks at a man whose work it once published and profited from.

The former editor of the Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, called the WikiLeaks disclosures, which his newspaper published in 2010, "one of the greatest journalistic scoops of the last 30 years". Awards were lavished and celebrated as if Julian Assange did not exist.

WikiLeaks' revelations became part of the Guardian's marketing plan to raise the paper's cover price. They made money, often big money, while WikiLeaks and Assange struggled to survive.



This is an abridged version of an address by John Pilger to a rally in Sydney, Australia, to mark Julian Assange's six years' confinement in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

With not a penny going to WikiLeaks, a hyped Guardian book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie deal. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, gratuitously abused Assange as a "damaged personality" and "callous".

They also revealed the secret password Julian had given the Guardian in confidence and which was designed to protect a digital file containing the US embassy cables.

With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding, who had enriched himself on the backs of both Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, stood among the police outside the embassy and gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh".

The question is why.

Julian Assange has committed no crime. He has never been charged with a crime. The Swedish episode was bogus and farcical and he has been vindicated.

Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape summed it up when they wrote, "The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction... The authorities care so little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will."

This truth was lost or buried in a media witch-hunt that disgracefully associated Assange with rape and misogyny. The witch-hunt included voices who described themselves as on the left and as feminist. They wilfully ignored the evidence of extreme danger should Assange be extradited to the United States.

According to a document released by Edward Snowden, Assange is on a "Manhunt target list". One leaked official memo says: "Assange is going to make a nice bride in prison. Screw the terrorist. He'll be eating cat food forever."

In Alexandria, Virginia - the suburban home of America's war-making elite - a secret grand jury, a throwback to the middle ages - has spent seven years trying to concoct a crime for which Assange can be prosecuted.

This is not easy; the US Constitution protects publishers, journalists and whistleblowers. Assange's crime is to have broken a silence.

No investigative journalism in my lifetime can equal the importance of what WikiLeaks has done in calling rapacious power to account. It is as if a one-way moral screen has been pushed back to expose the imperialism of liberal democracies: the commitment to endless warfare and the division and degradation of "unworthy" lives: from Grenfell Tower to Gaza.

When Harold Pinter accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, he referred to "a vast tapestry of lies up on which we feed". He asked why "the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought" of the Soviet Union were well known in the West while America's imperial crimes "never happened... even while [they] were happening, they never happened."

In its revelations of fraudulent wars (Afghanistan, Iraq) and the bald-faced lies of governments (the Chagos Islands), WikiLeaks has allowed us to glimpse how the imperial game is played in the 21st century. That is why Assange is in mortal danger.

Seven years ago, in Sydney, I arranged to meet a prominent Liberal Member of the Federal Parliament, Malcolm Turnbull.

I wanted to ask him to deliver a letter from Gareth Peirce, Assange's lawyer, to the government. We talked about his famous victory - in the 1980s when, as a young barrister, he had fought the British Government's attempts to suppress free speech and prevent the publication of the book *Spycatcher* - in its way, a WikiLeaks of the time, for it revealed the crimes of state power.

The prime minister of Australia was then Julia Gillard, a Labor Party politician who had declared WikiLeaks "illegal" and wanted to cancel Assange's passport - until she was told she could not do this: that Assange had committed no crime; that WikiLeaks was a publisher, whose work was protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Australia was one of the original signatories.

In abandoning Assange, an Australian citizen, and colluding in his persecution, Prime Minister Gillard's outrageous behaviour forced the issue of his recognition, under international law, as a political refugee whose life was at risk. Ecuador invoked the 1951 Convention and granted Assange refuge in its embassy in London.

Gillard has recently been appearing in a gig with Hillary Clinton; they are billed as pioneering feminists.

If there is anything to remember Gillard by, it a warmongering, sycophantic, embarrassing speech she made to the US Congress soon after she demanded the illegal cancellation of Julian's passport.

Malcolm Turnbull is now the Prime Minister of Australia. Julian Assange's father has written to Turnbull. It is a moving letter, in which he has appealed to the prime minister to bring his son home. He refers to the real possibility of a tragedy.

I have watched Assange's health deteriorate in his years of confinement without sunlight. He has had a relentless cough, but is not even allowed safe passage to and from a hospital for an X-ray.

Malcolm Turnbull can remain silent. Or he can seize this opportunity and use his government's diplomatic influence to defend the life of an Australian citizen, whose courageous public service is recognised by countless people across the world. He can bring Julian Assange home.

Follow John Pilger on twitter @johnpilger

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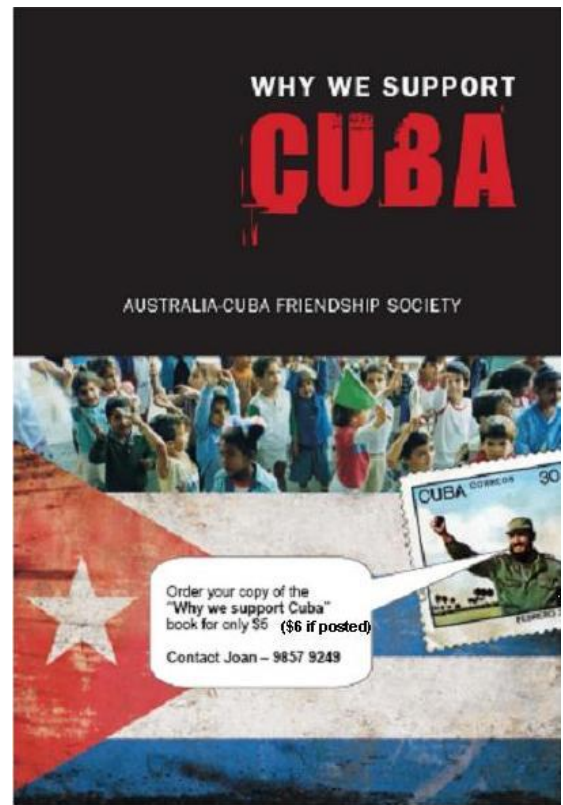
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