

AUSTRALIA CUBA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

Melbourne Branch Newsletter

JULY



Contact us via email: admin@melbourneacfs.org

www.melbourneacfs.org

Dear Comrades,

25 June 2020

Our world has certainly been turned on its head since I last wrote to you. We've seen the good and the awful. Huge numbers lost their jobs, shopping strips lost their shops, hoarders went bonkers (still at it), and we're not allowed to get close to each other (largely being ignored), but the pandemic that stole our freedom has given our natural world a breather, where our captivity has been its liberation. On a personal level with limited mobility, I've filled in my days (apart from gruelling visits to physios) with reading and writing and researching for my last book, using drawings from two boxes of originals, mixed with historical and political comment. I recommend 'Munich', a book based on the 11th hour meeting in September 1938 between Hitler, hell-bent on invading Czechoslovakia, and Chamberlain, in a last-ditch effort to preserve the shaky peace who was way out of his depth. I was only eight when war was declared and remember brownouts and rationing, a brother in the RAAF and an uncle in Africa, fathers digging trenches, mothers doing first aid courses and all of us kids knitting khaki balaclavas, gloves and socks.

Washington's efforts to remain neutral fell in a heap after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and invaded Thailand and Malaya. In early 1942, Melbourne felt the full blast of a Yankee invasion when 30,000 of them took over our city and our institutions and many of our young women who liked their flash uniforms, smooth manners and lavish spending, but they were as popular as the rats under the house with our poorly paid daggy diggers. In the May, Melbourne's love affair with the invaders took a nose-dive when the bodies of three women turned up. There was relief when a US soldier, Edward Leonski, was arrested and

confessed to the murders, but it was also the time when our sovereignty took one hell of a hit with the arrival of US General Douglas MacArthur who made it clear that the folks back home wouldn't accept their conscript sons being dragged before alien courts. Leonski was the first and only citizen to have been tried and sentenced to death in Australia under US law. The beginning of our grovelling relationship with Washington.

Good riddance to the House of Somyurek, brazen corrupter, branch stacker supremo, forger of signatures and a cancerous presence when we desperately need a strong progressive party to push back against our appalling government which chose this fraught time to forge ahead with two key pieces of legislation. The bills enable ASIO to snoop on journalists' data as part of a deal with the US and 'like-minded countries' to spy on each other's citizens, abolishes a questioning and detention power which was never used, but then expands ASIO's interrogation capacity, using force if necessary, if the poor sod being apprehended fails to turn up or tries to destroy or alter existing records. No wonder Australia has been called a 'one-legged democracy'.

Since 9/11, Australia has enacted a staggering 82 anti-terror laws, more than any comparable country, far exceeding the volume passed in the UK, Canada, and even in the United States. It's not only the volume, but their scope. Laws once considered 'extreme' are now a normal part of our criminal justice system, laws made easier to enact because Australia has no Bill of Rights. Such laws create new precedents and political conventions when it comes to the proper limits of power and the



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role of the state in protecting us. Since 9/11, we've seen an increased attack on whistleblowers and anyone speaking out, with secret charges, secret courts, secret buggings, secret sentencing of Witnesses 'J' and 'K' and police raids on journalists with a demand for fingerprints. These are fascist laws to criminalise dissent. Have you read about it? Not likely. In the global ranking of press freedom, Australia comes in at number 26, trailing behind Cape Verde, Liechtenstein, Namibia, Latvia and Samoa, with further cuts to what's left of our ABC. No wonder the voices of the left are virtually non-existent, and no wonder Australia has been called a 'one-legged democracy'. Unlike Cuba. The same day as a team of 85 Cuban doctors and

nurses arrived in Peru to help tackle the pandemic, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tightened the blockade that has already cost Cuba well over \$US130 billion and then had the gall to name Cuba as 'not co-operating fully' in US counter-terrorism efforts. A bit rich considering America's bloody track record. Since the US was founded in 1776, it has been at war for 214 of its 235 years of existence and spends more on the military than the next 19 biggest spending nations combined. In contrast to Trump's shameful behaviour, 26 countries now have Cuban medicos, generating enormous good will that money can't buy. A global campaign has started to award the Cuban doctors the Nobel Peace Prize. Viva!

*By Joan Coxsedg - Commentator-in-Chief
Melbourne ACFS
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Thank you
to everybody who donated to our
campaign to help Cuba in this
difficult time.

All ACFS branches across Australia are campaigning for donations to support Cuba in its fight against COVID-19 at home, and around the world. The outstanding humanitarian work and solidarity of Cuba's medical brigades is inspirational and has been praised by millions.

The response from ACFS members and their friends has been heartening. The Melbourne Branch has so far raised \$9,860 toward the national goal of \$50,000.



Cuban Medical Brigades nominated for Nobel Peace Prize



The ACFS has joined the international campaign to support the nomination of the Cuban Henry Reeve medical brigade for the Nobel Peace Prize. More than one hundred organizations from 20 countries around the world are supporting the campaign launched in France to demand the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Cuban medical brigades that fight COVID-19 around the world.

Created in 2005 by Fidel Castro, these medical brigades have been deployed to other countries in need, notably to help after the massive earthquake in Pakistan in 2005 and Haiti in 2010, and to fight against Ebola in West Africa in 2015. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2000 Cuban doctors, nurses, and health professionals, specialists in disaster situations and serious epidemics, have been deployed overseas in 28 countries. This is in addition to the doctors and nurses from Cuba already engaged in almost 70 assignments in various countries throughout the world.

At the same time Cuba has suffered the effects of a vicious 60-year blockade by the United States which causes daily shortages of food, fuel and other basic necessities including much needed medical supplies. Despite this, Cuba's humanitarian solidarity continues to inspire.

The Henry Reeve Brigade is an expression in practice of the possibility for solidarity among peoples in order to assist in the maintenance of global peace, reduction of poverty, attainment of social justice and the observation of human rights. Cuba's actions of cooperation and solidarity have shown the world that there exists an alternative to capitalism's ferocious competition for the benefit of a few.

The number of lives Cuban medics have saved is inestimable. Built on a foundation of mutual respect, Cuba's profound, selfless international solidarity is unparalleled. It represents faith in the future of humanity.

Please join us in supporting the NOMINATION of the CUBAN INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL BRIGADES "HENRY REEVE" for the NOBEL PEACE PRIZE.

There are several websites offering petitions to sign. Two websites with more information are:



<https://theinternationalcommittee.org/nobel-peace-prize-2021-en/>



<https://www.cubanobel.org/nobelcuba>



Promoting Friendship between the People of Cuba and Australia

Black Lives Matter in Socialist CUBA

By Andrew King

With the current focus on racism in western society, it is important to learn from those societies, such as Cuba, that have made true strides in racial and economic justice, in order to better envision the world that we want to create. A look at the history of Cuba makes it evident that the issue of race is central to the United States war on this socialist stronghold.

The Revolution's Measures Against Racism

Like most colonial nations, institutional racial oppression was brutal in pre-revolution Cuba. Black Cubans formed the most oppressed sector of society: with rampant job discrimination in which they had no access to most positions in government, health care, transportation, and retail. Segregation relegated Afro-Cubans to specific neighbourhoods and schools, and they were banned from hotels and beaches. Illiteracy was widespread among the most oppressed sectors, and medical care was out of reach. Few know that after Castro's failed guerilla attack on the Moncada Garrison in 1953, it was a black lieutenant from then Dictator Fulgencio Batista's army that found him in the hills, and — sympathizing with the rebel cause — saved Castro's life by sending him to jail in Santiago rather than to the Moncada Barracks where he would have been shot and killed along with the 70 guerilla soldiers who met such a fate.

When the revolution triumphed six years later, one of the new government's first measures was to abolish racial discrimination in employment and recreational sectors. When the rebel army tanks entered Havana, they crushed the hotel fences, which represented the old racial order signifying where the black and poor could not go. Castro's government abolished the private school system of the white Cuban elites and established a well-funded and integrated state school system for all. Revolutionary laws were passed to outlaw racial discrimination in housing, employment,

healthcare and education. The fight against racism and the struggle for socialism go hand in hand. The revolution dramatically improved the socioeconomic conditions of black workers and farmers, cutting rents in half, redistributing land, and providing universal free education and healthcare to all. Before 1959, over a quarter of Cubans were illiterate. The revolution launched a massive literacy campaign, sending brigades of student teachers into the most remote areas of the countryside, and in 1961, Cuba was declared free of illiteracy. Today Cuba has a 99.8 percent literacy rate, the highest in Latin America.

Solidarity with African-Americans

Cuba has always been a guiding light in the black freedom movement. Fidel's historic visit with Malcolm X in Harlem in 1960 was symbolic of the Cuban revolution's blow against colonialism and world white supremacy. Both Malcolm and Castro understood the centrality of racism to the capitalist system: "you can't have capitalism without racism," Malcolm once famously said. Along the same vein, at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Castro argued that:

"Racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia are not naturally instinctive reactions of the human beings but rather a social, cultural and political phenomenon born directly of wars, military conquests, slavery and the individual or collective exploitation of the weakest by the most powerful all along the history of human societies."

Assata Shakur, former leader of the Black Liberation Army and one of "America's Most Wanted", escaped prison in the 1970s, and sought refuge on the socialist island. Cuba has vowed to protect this revolutionary heroine, a crime for which the US will never forgive her. Throughout the '70s, other African-American revolutionaries such as Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton and Stokely Carmichael all visited the revolutionary Caribbean nation. Many



**SINCE THE SOCIALIST
REVOLUTION IN 1959,
CUBA HAS BEEN A
BEACON OF HOPE
FOR PEOPLE OF ALL
COLOURS ACROSS
THE WORLD**

black pastors and community leaders also established US-Cuba solidarity initiatives such as Pastors for Peace which has raised awareness to end the embargo of the island.

Less well-known is Cuba's historic and pivotal role in supporting the African Liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s. For a period spanning over a decade, the small island nation sent over 300,000 volunteer soldiers to Angola, not in pursuit of diamonds, oil or natural resources like the imperialist nations, but to assist the anti-colonial fighters of Angola in their struggle against the South African apartheid army which had invaded the newly independent nation. Cuban forces struck the decisive blow to defeat the apartheid army in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. In addition, Cuba sent troops to battle alongside independence fighters in Algeria, the Congo, Ethiopia and Guinea-Bissau. It was these historic feats of internationalist solidarity that prompted Nelson Mandela to visit the Caribbean nation after his release from prison, where he proudly stated : "The Cuban people have a special place in the hearts of the people's of Africa."

Socialist Health Care

One of the landmark pillars of the revolution has

been the establishment of a world-class health care system which provides free, quality medical care to all Cuban citizens, and has disproportionately benefitted the island's black and historically marginalized citizens. While all Cubans have free access to comprehensive medical care, people of colour in the United States (the richest country on earth) face extreme health disparities and make up over half of the 32 million non-elderly uninsured. Cuba has twice as many primary care doctors per capita as the United States, due to its prioritization of community-level preventative care.

Infant mortality rate is an important indicator of a country's health. In pre-revolution Cuba, the infant mortality rate was over 50 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Now it is down to 4.3 . Meanwhile the United States, one of the richest nations on earth, has a rate of 7.7 . Further, when you look at under-served regions of the US like Mississippi — which has the largest black population of any state — the infant mortality rate is 9.6 , double that of Cuba's. In other words, Black babies matter in Cuba — more so than they do in the US.

Revolutionary Doctors

If there's one accomplishment the international community cannot ignore it is Cuba's 'medical internationalism' which in 2014, saw 50,000 Cuban doctors saving lives in over 60 developing nations across the globe. While activists around the world attend protests, Cuba demonstrates her belief that black lives matter by sending doctors and medical personnel overseas to African and Caribbean nations to literally save black lives. Cuban doctors operate a comprehensive health program, which makes 3,000 doctors available for the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Cuba also sent medical brigades to Pakistan and Haiti after the deadly earthquakes in both countries, arriving within 72 hours as some of the first responders. The United States, on the other hand, sent thousands of marine soldiers to the island. This juxtaposition speaks volumes regarding the values of capitalist and socialist societies. In the aftermath of catastrophic disaster, one society exploited the crisis and sought to control black life; the other sought to save it.



In 2015, the same international Medical brigade spearheaded the fight against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, sending surgeons, intensive-care doctors, epidemiologists and pediatricians. These efforts earned Cuba an award from the World Health Organization. If it were not enough to export its own doctors to countries in need, the Cuban revolution has also taken up the admirable task of training doctors from other countries free of charge in Havana's Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM). ELAM currently has an enrolment of over 19,000 students most of whom are from Africa and Latin America. Medical school is free for all students, and this includes over 100 scholarships for African American and low-income students from the United States who have agreed to use their training to serve low-income communities at home. Despite these social gains, Cuba is far from a racial utopia, and Cubans themselves know that the struggle against racism, is part of the revolution and

is an ongoing process. Blacks are still under-represented in high-level government positions and in the tourism industry. However, most can acknowledge that it is quite difficult for a society to totally overcome a racial legacy of 400 years of colonialism, in just 50 years of revolution.

It is precisely because of these anti-racist and pro-worker policies, and Cuba's audacity to stand tall in the face of empire, that the U.S. government has labelled her "a violator of human rights." On the contrary, it is the U.S. government, who is the real human rights violator - whose police forces continue to take black lives with impunity and wage a war on the poor. Let us lift the embargo on Cuba and put the embargo on US capitalism and racism. Let us not forget that if there ever was a place where black lives truly matter, it's Cuba.

Edited from <https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Black-Lives-Matter-in-Cuba-20170821-0020.html>



End the US Blockade of Cuba

Childhood vaccination is maintained, despite COVID-19

Cuba's immunization program ensures that 98% of children are vaccinated against 13 diseases.

By Yudi Castro Morales



Cuba's vaccination program against 14 diseases is being maintained amidst the battle against COVID-19. Only the application of the anti-polio and anti-flu vaccines was postponed, given the specific situation the country is facing due to the pandemic - but the doses are available and will be administered at a later date.

The news was recently announced by Dr. Francisco Durán, director of Epidemiology at the Ministry of Public Health (Minsap), during one of his customary press conferences to provide updated information on the COVID-19 epidemic in Cuba and around the world. Although some 20 million children in the world do not receive the vaccinations they need, the Cuban regimen of 11 vaccines, including eight produced nationally, is implemented by age group to maximize benefits.

Dr. Durán noted that while two scheduled vaccinations have been postponed, others are being administered to the appropriate age groups as planned. He noted that the population is accustomed to having the polio campaign completed by this date, but since the administration requires the mobilization of medical personnel and children must leave their homes, the decision was made to postpone this round, which will take place later this year.

Health Minister Dr. José Ángel Portal Miranda, tweeted a message stating that, aware of the importance of Cuba's solid National Immunization Program, Cuba joins the World Health Organization's call for all people in the world to receive the vaccinations they need.

<http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2020-05-28/childhood-vaccination-is-maintained-despite-covid-19>



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Trump Hammers Cuba While Cuba Cures the Sick Worldwide

By Medea Benjamin & Leonardo Flores

A team of 85 Cuban doctors and nurses arrived in Peru on June 3 to help the Andean nation tackle the coronavirus pandemic. That same day, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced another tightening of the sanctions screws. This time he targeted seven Cuban entities, including Fincimex, one of the principal financial institutions handling remittances to the country. Also targeted was Marriott International, which was ordered to cease operations in Cuba, and other companies in the tourism sector, an industry that constitutes 10 percent of Cuba's GDP and has been devastated globally by the pandemic.

It seems that the more Cuba helps the world, the more it gets hammered by the Trump administration. While Cuba has endured a U.S. embargo for nearly 60 years, Trump has revved up the stakes with a "maximum pressure" strategy that includes more than 90 economic measures placed against the nation since January 2019. Josefina Vidal, Cuba's ambassador to Canada, called the measures "unprecedented in their level of aggression and scope" and designed to "deprive the country of income for the development of the economy." Since its inception, the embargo has cost Cuba well over \$130 billion dollars, according to a 2018 estimate. In 2018-2019 alone, the economic impact was \$4 billion, a figure that does not include the impact of a June 2019 Trump administration travel ban aimed at harming the tourist industry.

While the embargo is supposed to have humanitarian exemptions, the health sector has not been spared. Cuba is known worldwide for its universal public healthcare system, but the embargo has led to shortages of medicines and medical supplies, particularly for patients with AIDS and cancer. Doctors at Cuba's National Institute of Oncology have had to amputate the lower limbs of children with cancer because the American companies that have a monopoly on the technology can't sell it to Cuba. In the midst of the pandemic, the U.S. blocked a donation of facemasks and COVID-19 diagnostic kits from Chinese billionaire Jack Ma.

Not content to sabotage Cuba's domestic health sector, the Trump administration has been attacking Cuba's international medical assistance, from the teams fighting coronavirus today to those who have travelled all over the world

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since the 1960's providing services to underserved communities in 164 countries. The U.S. goal is to cut the island's income now that the provision of these services has surpassed tourism as Cuba's number one source of revenue. Labelling these volunteer medical teams "victims of human trafficking" because part of their salaries goes to pay for Cuba's healthcare system, the Trump administration convinced Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil to end their cooperation agreements with Cuban doctors. Pompeo then applauded the leaders of these countries for refusing "to turn a blind eye" to Cuba's alleged abuses. The triumphalism was short lived: a month after that quote, the Bolsonaro government in Brazil begged Cuba to resend its doctors amid the pandemic. U.S. allies all over the world, including in Qatar, Kuwait, South Africa, Italy, Honduras and Peru have gratefully accepted this Cuban aid. So great is the admiration for Cuban doctors that a global campaign has sprung up to award them the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Trump administration is not just libelling doctors, but the whole country. In May, the State Department named Cuba as one of five countries "not cooperating fully" in U.S. counterterrorism efforts. The main pretext was the nation's hosting of members of Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN). Yet even the State Department's own press release notes that ELN members are in Cuba as a result of "peace negotiation protocols." Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez called the charges dishonest and "facilitated by the ungrateful attitude of the Colombian government" that broke off talks with the ELN in 2019. It should also be noted that Ecuador was the original host of the ELN-Colombia talks, but Cuba was asked to step in after the Moreno government abdicated its responsibilities in 2018.

The classification of Cuba as "not cooperating" with counterterrorism could lead to Cuba being placed on the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism list, which carries tougher penalties. This idea was floated by a senior Trump administration official to Reuters last month. Cuba had been on this list from 1982 to 2015, despite that fact that, according to former State Department official Jason Blazakis, "it was legally determined that Cuba was not actively engaged in violence that could be defined as terrorism under any credible definition of the word."

Of course, the United States is in no position to claim that other countries do not cooperate in counterterrorism. For years, the U.S. harboured Luis Posada Carriles, mastermind of the bombing of a Cuban civilian airplane in 1976 that killed 73 people. More recently, the U.S. has yet to even comment on the April 30 attack on the Cuban Embassy in Washington D.C., when a man fired on the building with an automatic rifle.

While there are certainly right-wing ideologues like Secretary Pompeo and Senator Rubio orchestrating Trump's maximum pressure campaign, for Trump himself, Cuba is all about the U.S. elections. His hard line against the tiny island nation may have helped swing the Florida gubernatorial campaign during the midterm elections, yet it's not clear that this will serve him well in a presidential year. According to conventional wisdom and polls, younger Cuban-Americans—who like most young people, don't tend to vote in midterms—are increasingly sceptical of the U.S. embargo, and overall, Cuba isn't the overriding issue for Cuban-Americans. Trump won the Cuban-American vote in 2016, but Hillary Clinton took between 41 and 47% percent of that electorate, significantly higher than any Democrat in decades.

As an electoral strategy, these are signs that Trump's aggression towards Cuba may not pay off. Of course, the strategy might not be just about votes but also about financing and ensuring that the Cuban-American political machinery is firmly behind Trump.

The strategy has certainly not paid off when it comes to achieving the goal of regime change. The Trump administration is arguably farther from achieving regime change in Cuba now than the U.S. has ever been in over 60 years of intervention. During Trump's tenure, Cuba calmly transitioned from the presidency of Raul Castro to that of Miguel Díaz-Canel. In 2019, Cuban voters overwhelmingly ratified a new constitution. These aren't signs of a country on the brink of collapse.



All Trump has achieved is making life more difficult for the island's 11 million inhabitants, who, like people all over the world, have been battered by the economic impact from coronavirus. Tourism has collapsed. Income from remittances has tanked (both because of new U.S. restrictions and less income in the hands of the Cuban diaspora). Venezuela, once a major benefactor, is mired in its own crisis. But Cuba's economy, which was forecast to contract by 3.7% before the pandemic hit, has been through worse, particularly during the 1991 to 2000 economic crisis known as the "special period" after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A change in the White House would bring some relief, although Joe Biden has stated a rather ambivalent position, saying he would restore relations as President Obama did, but adding that he was open to using sanctions as punishment for Cuba's support to the Venezuelan government.

It's clear that from now until November, and perhaps for four more years, the Trump administration will pummel its island neighbour. Cuba will continue to seek global condemnation on the blockade (the 2019 UN vote was 187 against vs 3 in favour—the U.S., Brazil and Israel) and continue to show what a good neighbour looks like. It responded to these latest provocations in the way that only Cuba does: with more global solidarity, sending Covid-19 healing brigades to Guinea and Kuwait a day after the June 3 round of sanctions. A total of 26 countries now have Cuban medical personnel caring for their sick.

That is the kind of goodwill that money just can't buy and it greatly presents a stark contrast to the Trump administration's shameful behaviour during the pandemic. Back in March, as Cuban doctors arrived in Italy, former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa tweeted: "One day we will tell our children that, after decades of movies and propaganda, at the moment of truth, when humanity needed help at a time when the great powers were in hiding, Cuban doctors began to arrive, without asking anything in return."

A total of 26 countries now have Cuban medical personnel caring for their sick. That is the kind of goodwill that money just can't buy and it presents a stark contrast to the Trump administration's shameful behaviour

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/06/16/trump-hammers-cuba-while-cuba-cures-sick-worldwide>



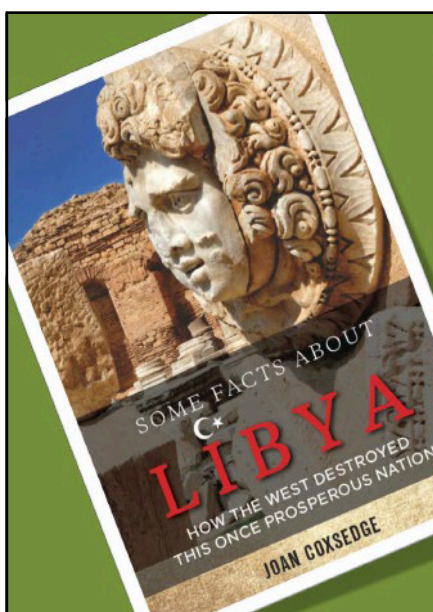
Old CUBA World Heritage
By Joan Coxsedge

A personal story about Cuba during my three visits to the tiny island nation with drawings, text and a potted history.

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- Eusebio Leal, Chief Historian, City of Havana

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UNESCO recognizes Cuba's leadership

in Education

By Enrique Moreno Gimeranez

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recognized the results of Cuba's work to achieve quality, inclusive education in the 2020 Global Monitoring Report on Education for All -known as the GEM report.

This global monitoring mechanism is used to evaluate progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDA) No. 4: Ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The 2020 report emphasizes that Cuba has achieved 100% participation in early childhood education, in accordance with target 4.2 of this goal: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood care and development and preschool education, so that they are ready for primary school."

Yahima Esquivel, Cuba's permanent representative to UNESCO, noted on her Twitter account that the report "recognizes the effectiveness of the Cuban program "Educate your Child" in ensuring inclusive, quality education from early childhood and in rural contexts," and praises "Cuba's Sex Education Program, highlighting its preventive approach, gender and sexual rights, throughout the basic curriculum, optional courses and postgraduate studies."

The diplomat likewise commented on the international organization's recognition of Cuba exemplary work on inclusion of students with special needs in the conventional education system.

Once again, UNESCO recognizes the leadership of Cuba in this sector at the world level, a nation that in Article 73 of its Constitution states, "Education is a right of all persons and a responsibility of the state, which guarantees free, accessible, quality education services for comprehensive development, from early childhood to postgraduate university education."

<http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2020-06-25/unesco-recognizes-cubas-leadership-in-education>

For more news and articles on Cuba and Latin America, check the following websites:

www.en.granma.cu

www.telesurenglish.net

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