

EMBASSIES OF CUBA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



No. 6 / March 12th, 2018

ABSTRACT

Cuba's general director for U.S. affairs of the Cuban foreign ministry has rounded on the US State Department for its 'political fabrication' over the alleged 'attacks' made on US diplomats in their Havana embassy; we follow with coverage of 'anachronistic' continuation of the blockade by the Trump administration and the rejection of denial of Venezuelan participation at the ALBA summit.

In International News we look at relations with Syria, and back inside Cuba at the elections ongoing there; excellent survival rates for children with heart conditions; the role of women in Cuban society; good attendance at the FIAGROP agricultural show and, finally, a creditable seventh for Cuba in the recent international athletics meet in England.

INSIDE CUBA

Polls open for over 8 million Cubans on Sunday's legislative elections

Over 8 million Cubans have voted to elect the 605 members of the National Assembly and 1,265 delegates to the 15 provincial legislative bodies of the People's Power.

By means of free voting, which is secret and egalitarian according to the 1992 Electoral Law of Cuba, the registered voters will go to the ballot boxes in 24,470 electoral polling stations in the island's 168 municipalities.

National Electoral Commission (CEN) president Alina Balseiro stated conditions were already created for the second stage of the 2017-2018 general elections.

A total of 12,515 delegates were elected last year, for the 168 municipal assemblies.



Balseiro said a test trial was conducted to check all the elements of the voting system, scrutiny, calculation and analysis of information, as well as to identify likely problems to be overcome.

'The results of the test were satisfactory, and we were able to detect difficulties that were solved in the course of the week,' she said.

In statements to *Prensa Latina*, CEN's vice president Tomas Amaran highlighted the strength of the Cuban electoral system.

One of the most relevant issues is citizens' participation in the process, as well as its direction, he said.

Amaran also mentioned the way in which the candidates are proposed and nominated, directly by the people or mass organizations and without the mediation of individual political propaganda, campaigns or economic interest.

Cuban higher education deputy minister Gil Ramon Gonzalez played out the participation of more than 17,000 university and high school students as collaborators in the elections.

For the elections, more than 200,000 citizens were trained to work at the voting process as electoral commissioners and supporting staff at polling stations.

The Sunday elections will lead to the formation of the National Assembly, and once Parliament is proclaimed and it chooses its speaker and other leaders, it will elect Cuba's new president.

Prensa Latina, March 11

INSIDE CUBA



Cuban foreign minister speaks of democratic nature of elections

Cuban minister of foreign relations, Bruno Rodríguez, has made a statement assuring the public that this country's elections are an extraordinarily democratic event.

After casting his vote in a polling station of the capital's municipality

of Playa, the minister told the press that the elections in the island are distinguished by the participation of the people without the intervention of transnational corporations, without money changing hands, without politicking or manipulation of votes nor the political conduct of persons.

Rodríguez added in Cuban elections there are no fierce battles between candidates, division, fragmentation is not incentivised nor hate-filled.

On the contrary, he said, it is the genuine expression of the people's will on the direction to follow, on the election of people of which way to go, the election of persons who, with vocation of serving, will work for an ideal of nation and will mark the direction for Cuban socialism to be more efficient, democratic and just.

However, the minister commented that international rightwing media will surely attempt to tarnish the image of Cuba despite evidence proven this day of a participative and democratic process.

Rodriguez stressed that it is the Cuban people who freely nominated the candidates since the first stage of elections (when the delegates to municipal assemblies of the People's Power were elected).

Deputies to the National Assembly that are elected today will make up the candidacy to the State Council, whose members will be determined by secret and direct vote, in ballots of the own legislative organ, he recalled.

According to the FM, at that moment there will exist a balance between renewal and continuity.

Rodriguez added that the new National Assembly will face the challenge of carrying the country forward in a process of economic transformations and implementing the Cuban development model.

We are aware of our difficulties, shortages and a difficult context, but we have that unique instrument in the world that is the People's Power to carry on a program with a wide sense of unity and a model ever more just.

On this day, over eight million Cubans are summoned to the polling stations to elect the deputies of the National Assembly of the People's Power (parliament) and the delegates to the provincial level.

To that end were set up 24 thousand 470 polling stations throughout the country, which opened at 7:00 local time and will keep on receiving electors until 18:00 hours.

Prensa Latina, March 11

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Unilateral decision by the United States government is politically motivated



“The announcement by the State Department this past March 2 is based on another political fabrication that adds to the long history of hostility which is very well known to the people of Cuba” said the general director for U.S. affairs of the Cuban foreign ministry, Carlos Fernández de Cossío in a statement to the press

The decision by the United States government, which unilaterally maintains the drawdown of its staff at the U.S. embassy in Cuba indefinitely, was politically motivated and had no relation whatsoever to the safety and security of its officials in Havana.

According to the diplomat, the measure has a particular impact on consular services on which thousands of citizens depend, who are forced to incur additional expenses, as they have to travel to third countries to apply for temporary or immigrant visas.

Therefore, he said, the United States has imposed a financial punishment on thousands of people, as well as anguish and insecurity on the relationship of those people with their families and close friends.

He underscored that the U.S. government is responsible for the humanitarian cost of this measure.

In addition, he rejected the repeated use by the State Department of the term “attacks” as it knows for certain that there have been no attacks or any deliberate act

against U.S. diplomats in Cuba. Fernández de Cossío also stated that none of the reports issued by the State Department or by the different experts, including the scientific community, provide evidence indicating that an attack took place in Cuba. The specialized agencies and the U.S. scientific community have confirmed that there is no evidence of an attack having taken place.

“It is a term whose use entails an ill intention and is not in keeping with the vocabulary or the content of official exchanges”, he stated.

Likewise, the Director General for U.S. Affairs described as hostile and slanderous the travel alert recommending U.S. citizens to reconsider visiting Cuba, which was issued on March 2.

In his opinion, said travel alert is based on political motives and has no relation to the health of officials or concern for travellers.

“It is not true that the diplomatic staff of the embassy is or has been at risk. It is not true that said staff has been targeted. It is not true that a deliberate action against diplomats from the United States has been allowed or taken place in Cuba by anybody. It is not true that U.S. citizens have reasons to fear for their safety and security in Cuba”, he said.

“The U.S. government has enough evidence that Cuba is a safe country for U.S. diplomats and for diplomats from any country, as it is for Cuban citizens, foreign residents and for millions of travelers from all corners of the world who visit Cuba every year.

“The government of the United States and its State Department know perfectly well that Cuba fully observes its responsibilities with regard to the attention and protection of the Diplomatic Corps”.

On the arbitrary and unwarranted expulsion of 17 diplomatic officials of the Embassy of Cuba in Washington D.C., last October, Fernandez de Cossío stated that said act was additional confirmation of the fact that with regard to this issue the State Department acts in response to political motives.

“Cuba is and will continue to be a safe, stable and attractive country. It remains willing to engage in a respectful dialogue and to advance issues that concern the lives of millions of peoples”.

“The announcement by the State Department this past March 2 is based on another political fabrication that adds to the long history of hostility which is very well known to the people of Cuba”, he concluded.

Granma, March 6

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Former Obama's advisor considers ‘anachronistic’ blockade on Cuba

The U.S. blockade on Cuba is now anachronistic and meaningless, has said political scientist Robert Malley, who served as special adviser to former U.S. President Barack Obama.

'The United States-Cuba dossier is currently anachronistic (...). Cuba is not a threat to the national security of the United States, so the sanctions, the blockade, all that, makes no sense anymore,' he said responding to a question from *Prensa Latina*, during a meeting with members of the Foreign Press Association in France.

The current president at the International Crisis Group said that from the executive sphere and without the Congress agreement, Obama tried to go as far as he could to ease the economic, commercial and financial siege.



'Obama did it in his own way, and he went as far as he thought he could go,' he said, adding that Obama acted in that way because he believed it, and because of Washington's commercial and political interests.

Malley recalled that the United States was isolated in the continent, not a single country supported it in its position towards Cuba, which 'damaged the strategic interests.'

As for the position adopted by current President Donald Trump, Malley said 'we have seen a regression, but not a regression to zero, that is, Trump did not return to the point we were before Obama.'

After saying that the blockade has not had the expected result and it should be re-

viewed, he stated that unfortunately keeping it is one of the issues Trump assumed as a campaign commitment, and perhaps he goes against his own instincts as a businessman.

Malley hopes that the president would not continue advancing in the regression promoted in the relations with Havana. 'There are those who are putting pressure on him to do more, but I hope he stops there, to at least preserve what has been reached, and then, let's wait for the post-Tump era to return to the issue and turn the page. This is truly an inglorious page, which did not succeed,' he said.

During the last few years of the Obama administration, Malley served as special advisor to the president and the White House coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region.

Prensa Latina, March 6

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

15TH ALBA Summit final declaration supports Venezuela's attendance at the Summit of the Americas

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) supported has the right of Venezuela to participate in the 8th Summit of the Americas.

ALBA-TCP secretary general David Choquehuanca expressed that the organization intends to "apply diplomatic and political measures" to guarantee the participation of Venezuela in the event in Lima, Peru. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) supported March 5

the right of Venezuela to participate in the 8th Summit of the Americas, scheduled to take place in April in Lima, Peru

The final declaration of the 15th ALBA-TCP Summit rejected the exclusion of this South American nation and its President Nicolás Maduro from the high-level meeting to be held in the Peruvian capital, reported PL.



The secretary general of the integration bloc, David Choquehuanca, expressed during the reading of the conclusive text that ALBA-TCP intends to “apply diplomatic and political measures” to guarantee the participation of Venezuela in said event.

The organisation expressed its disagreement “with the pronouncement by a group of countries of the continent, issued on February 13, 2018, in Lima, Peru, which constitutes interference in the internal affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

“We urge the international community to abstain from exercising coercion of any type against the political independence and territorial integrity of Venezuela, as a practice incompatible with International Law and the Charter of the United Nations, and contrary to the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace,” the text continued.

The declaration also denounces Washington’s attempts to return to the mechanism of regional domination represented by the Monroe Doctrine, as well as military threats and calls for a coup against the legitimate government of Venezuela. Also echoed is the international demand for the definitive lifting of the U.S. blockade imposed for more than half a century against Cuba.

ALBA-TCP member countries repudiated the advance of political and economic corruption in the region, “manifested by the growing inequality in the distribution of wealth.”

They also reiterated the commitment to “Latin American and Caribbean unity,” and defended their “commitment to genuinely Latin American and Caribbean integration processes such as CELAC, UNASUR, Petrocaribe, CARICOM and ALBA-TCP, to guarantee the sovereignty, independence, equality and self-determination of our peoples.”

Granma, March 6

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Syria, Cuba representatives address bilateral agenda

The deputy minister of foreign affairs and expatriates of Syria, Faisal al-Mekdad, has discussed with the deputy minister of foreign affairs of Cuba, Marcelino Medina, the main issues on the bilateral agenda.



According to diplomatic sources, the deputy foreign ministers presided over the round of inter-ministerial political consultations between the two states.

The two parties, which exchanged points of view related to issues on the international agenda, agreed on the possibilities of strengthening trade and cooperation links in areas such as health and training of human resources.

During the occasion, the Cuban representative thanked the 'permanent support provided by Syria to the resolution of Cuba against the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States.

He also reaffirmed the Caribbean country's support for the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria, without foreign interference and with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this Middle East country.

Syria has been merged in a bloody war since March 2011, which left the balance of more than half a million dead and injured, and significant economic losses, according to United Nations and independent agencies.

Cuban foreign minister arrived in Damascus on Tuesday last to pay a two-day visit to the Arab nation, where he plans to meet with senior Syrian officials.

Prensa Latina, March 6

INSIDE CUBA



Cuba 'remarkable survival rate in children heart surgeries'

With a survival rate of more than 90 percent, Cuba is now showing encouraging results in cardio-pediatric surgery, based on the operation of a national referral network for countries with the same development. according to statements to *Prensa Latina* by Dr.

Herminia Palenzuela, specialist of the William Soler Pediatric Cardiac Centre of Havana, and coordinator of that system. She pointed out that there are more than 10,000 surgical operations performed in that facility, axis of this first level care in the nation.

She also mentioned the thousands of interventional catheterization procedures carried out throughout the 31 years of that hospital, located according to his qualified personnel and equipment in a mid-range worldwide, in accordance with the political will to prioritize such a sensitive field of the medicine.

Institution founder Palenzuela stated that the basic component of this noble task in for the health of the Cuban children is the National Cardio-Pediatric Network itself and primary health care, through which congenital anomalies and cardiac conditions can be detected in time.

'There has to be a prepared and committed staff to diagnose them, treat them and, if necessary, refer them to William Soler,' added the expert, who pointed out that before the opening of that centre there was no cardiovascular surgery for those ages in the country and the sick had no future.

She highlighted the importance of the assistance role of neonatologists for the early detection and follow-up of surgically treated patients when returning to their provinces, where a team headed by a cardiopaediatrician and with the support of other specialists, nurses and technicians is in charge of their care.

During two day meeting this valuable area of the Cuban health system was explored, with analysis about its behaviour in several territories, a workshop on pre-natal diagnosis and updates on cardiomyopathies and interventional catheterization.

Prensa Latina, March 10



Cuban women: A revolution within the Revolution

It is almost impossible to talk about future projects in Cuba or the work done over all these years to construct a socialist society, without mentioning the role of women in decision making and their contribution in key spaces since the tri-

umph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959.

Cuban women make up 48% of the state sector workforce, with a similar percent occupying management positions. Excellent employment, participation and leadership opportunities are open to women, for example, eight out of every ten attorneys in the country are female, as Teresa Amarelle Boué, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and a member of the Communist Party of Cuba Political Bureau reported.

Meanwhile, women constitute 48.86% of deputies in the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament), a figure that demonstrates the important contribution made by Cuban women to drafting policy and perfecting the island's socialist system.

Likewise, 78.5% of healthcare professionals are women, as well as almost half of all of those conducting scientific research. Women also constitute 66% of the country's highly trained technicians and professionals, receiving the same salary as their male counterparts for the same work.

Cuban women also have access to free and universal education and healthcare and represent 60% of all university graduates.

THE FMC

A revolution within the Revolution, is how Fidel Castro Ruz described women's participation in the construction of a new society —the same spirit that led to the founding of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), on August 23, 1960, with Vilma Espín as president, who stood out as an example of commitment to the revolutionary struggle and the defence of women's rights.

"There are many things our country can feel fortunate about, among them, above all, the magnificent people it possesses. Here it is not only men that fight; here just like men, women also fight," stated Castro..

Since then, the FMC has continued to grow and today has over four million members, 90.6% of Cuban women over the age of 14 years, the minimum age requirement to become a member.

The FMC has created institutions centred on helping Cuban families, such as the Community Women and Family Guidance Centres, which undertake educational and prevention work, and ensure that women, men, children and seniors receive individualized care when it comes to conflict resolution, whether it be a case of domestic violence, legal advice or other matters.

The organisation also visits communities and local maternity facilities where it offers support and advice to families, especially information regarding safe sex and the risks associated with teen pregnancy.

What is more, the Federation gives special attention to a sensitive but important issue: prostitution. Based on the Cuban government's zero tolerance policy as regards procuring, corruption of minors and other forms of sexual abuse, the FMC supports victims and those at risk, undertaking work at a community level, where it carries out prevention efforts and offers guidance.

HEALTHCARE GUARANTEED

The political will of the Cuban government to guarantee comprehensive healthcare for women should be noted, with the implementation of various universal healthcare programs designed around the family.

These include the maternal-infant health program; cervical, uterine and breast cancer screening; as well as a parenthood guidance plan; support for older adults with specific initiatives designed for elderly women; and finally, a program to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS.

The maternal-infant health program is a priority for the Ministry of Public Health in its efforts to reduce the country's infant mortality rate - which stood at 4 per 1,000 live births in 2017 - and maternal deaths every year.

It also includes measures to reduce the mortality rate among school age children, and deaths caused by birth defects, as well as providing the population with different forms of contraceptive, including legal, free abortions performed in public hospitals.

Likewise, the program ensures the strict monitoring of pregnant women, with over 12 check-ups throughout their pregnancy, clinical and diagnostic tests, the admittance of at risk women to the appropriate facilities and conducting all possible deliveries in a hospital.

During their first few months, infants receive check-ups every seven to 15 days, home visits and medical examinations, as well as scheduled vaccinations within the first year of life.

Meanwhile, care of the elderly in Cuba is promoted from within the family, with a state program which prioritises initiatives for those of retirement age, above all women (60 years of age) with university courses for Older Adults, educational workshops and programs for seniors; direct medical attention from the local doctor; senior's circles which promote physical exercise and recreational activities; retirement homes providing full time care, and day care centres which offer part-time assistance for families unable to look after elderly members during the day.

In this same vein, the cervical, uterine and breast cancer screening program includes regular 'pap' tests conducted at the local family doctors' office. Women are also encouraged to conduct breast self-exams and visit their doctor if they suspect anything. Meanwhile, women diagnosed with cancer are provided with medical care, medicines, surgery and specialized treatments.

Regarding parenthood, in 2003 the Decree-Law 234 relating to Maternity Leave was issued with Complementary Resolution number 22/2003, granting both men and women maternity/paternity leave during the first year of life, with the intention of redefining traditional parental roles by placing shared responsibility at the center of child-parent relations.

Meanwhile, the STI prevention program includes, first and foremost, talks and events on how to tackle these infections, with condoms available in local pharmacies. If a person has an STI they are provided with free medical treatment and the appropriate medications, no matter the cost.

What is more, Cuba was the first country in the world to receive validation from the World Health Organization of having eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

Illnesses which exclusively affect women, and biological processes such as pregnancy, maternity and menopause, are all prioritized within each of these programs, which form part of Cuba's free and universal healthcare system, offering broad coverage and quality of treatment to patients, with efforts centered on health promotion and disease prevention.

Today, however, these programs must also include aspects specifically linked to gender in the context of women's daily lives, such as stress and exhaustion stemming from their double workload of holding down a job and managing a home.

In this regard, there is a marked interest in promoting the active participation of men in child care, an issue which is hindered by the continued existence of social prejudices and stereotypes. Statistics reveal that only 90 men took advantage of the new paternity law after it was approved, above all following the death of the mother or other specific situations.

It is worth noting that Cuban law includes a series of regulations affording special rights to women during both the pre and post-natal period, starting from 34 weeks through to when the child can walk; while working mothers can breast feed for as long as they like.

A great deal has been achieved over the years, although much remains to be done, as seen in spaces calling for an end to violence against women and girls, in debates on gender equality, reproductive rights and sex education, as well as work to dismantle stereotypes inherited from a misogynist and patriarchal society: all of which form part of efforts to continue building a more just and equal society, where women continue to lead a revolution within the Revolution.

Granma, March 9

INSIDE CUBA

Farmers and ranchers from 18 countries come to FIAGROP 2018



Based in the Rancho Boyeros fairground, the oldest in Cuba, representatives from Latin America, Europe, Africa and the United States are attending FIAGROP 2018.

At a press conference Ignacio Caraballo, a member of the organizing committee, explained that this year's edition will be attended

by 125 national leading producers as exhibitors. For the first time, several foreign companies will arrive, among them the Mexican Papalotla, a seed producer. According to Caraballo, the fair is the most important event in the agri-food sector of the country, hence the portfolio of foreign investment opportunities in this sector will be presented at the usual trade fair.

The stand of Germany will be one of the largest, with the presence of 10 representatives of that European nation.

Exhibition and auction of animals, varied activities, and concerts, as well as conferences by experts, are included in the general program of the fair.

CubaSí, March 9

SPORT: ATHLETICS



Cuba ties for seventh place at World Indoor Championships

With a gold and a bronze medal, Cuba shared the seventh place in the standings of the IAAF World Indoor Athletics Championships, which have ended in Birmingham, Great Britain.

Cuba equaled the Czech Republic, in a list led by United States (6-10-2), fol-

lowed by Ethiopia (4-1-0) and Poland (2-2-1), UK (2-1-4), France (2-0-1) and Ivory Coast (1-1-0), according to IAAF official website.

By points, the athletes of the Caribbean island totalled 20 units, thus ranking twelfth, very close to Spain (21).

America widely commanded this contest with 208 points, escorted by the host team (67) and Ethiopia (57).

Juan Miguel Echevarria, who is only 19, was Cuba's gold medalist by winning the men's long jump event with 8.46 meters, which is the world lead record so far this year.

Meanwhile, Yorgelis Rodriguez, also highlighted when finishing third in pentathlon by scoring 4,637 points, thus setting a national record.

Now the Caribbean nation accumulates in the history of these competitions 45 medals (17-15-13). (ACN)

Radio Cadena Agramonte, March 5

Text edited by David Reade (www.netmedianz.com), on behalf of the Cuban Embassy, Wellington, from Cuban news agency sources.

Embassy of Cuba in New Zealand

<http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/en/new-zealand>

