

Asia reaffirms its friendship with Cuba

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Friends of Cuba in Asia and Oceania support Cuba's social project with their solidarity, despite the geographic distance and cultural differences, according to Leima Martínez Freire, director for Asia at the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).

Across the region, more than 108 groups in 20 countries are active.

Admiration of the island country exists even among those living in areas far removed from urban centers, because they have received support from Cuban educational and medical brigades.

Given the occurrence of earthquakes and other natural disasters, as well as cooperation programs in this part of the world, brigades from the Henry Reeve Contingent specialized in disasters and serious epidemics have offered medical attention to the population in several Asian countries, while youth from the region have graduated from Cuban universities, most commonly as medical doctors.

Martínez, who studied English language pedagogy, reported that every year solidarity organizations coordinate national and regional events to denounce the economic, commercial, and financial blockade of Cuba by the United States, and the return of territory illegally occupied by the U.S. Naval base in Guantánamo.

"This year, 2018, a national conference of friendship associations in Australia will

be held in the city of Adelaide. Recently, friends from Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea participated in the May Day brigade, and in September we will celebrate the 45th anniversary of South Vietnam's liberation and the visit by our Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro to liberated areas in South Vietnam," the ICAP leader reported.

Activities have recalled the legacy of the leader of the Cuban Revolution and commemorated the 90th anniversary of the birth of Ernesto Che Guevara, who made several trips to the Asian continent as a Cuban leader in the 1960s, and participated in meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement.

"We are preparing a regional solidarity conference with friends from India, Nepal, and Pakistan, to be held in Nepal, even though there is no Cuban diplomatic mission there," Martínez explained.

She emphasized that support exists for Cuba's socialist project in Nepal and that friends there have done a great deal of work to refute media campaigns to discredit the Revolution.



Fidel's visit to South Vietnam in September of 1973, alongside Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, exemplifies Cuba's historic friendship and solidarity with Asian countries. **Photo:** Granma Archives

Asian students at Cuban universities organize different activities with their respective diplomatic missions in Havana, to commemorate their countries'

historic and special dates, Martínez said, noting, “An organization entitled Asian Women functions here, and in the month of April will present an Asian Bazaar, to build connections and maintain the longstanding ties of sisterhood shared by our peoples.”

She also indicated that young Asian graduates from Cuba’s institutions of higher learning join efforts in their home countries, and have strengthened the activities of solidarity groups with their enthusiasm and energy.

“These young people lived with us more than six years, and become disseminators of Cuba’s reality. They have a deep understanding of the significance of the Revolution. They have been involved in the social project we are constructing and defend it on all stages,” Martínez said, citing the example of the more than 800 medical school graduates from Timor Leste who express great affection for Cuba.

Although the Polynesian island nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu do not have Cuban embassies, friends there are always sending messages of encouragement and support, the ICAP leader reported.

“On the 17th of every month, supporters in Australia hold demonstrations in front of the U.S. embassy to demand an end to its interventionist policies toward Cuba. Activists in other Asian countries have gotten their parliaments to approve resolutions demanding an end to the blockade,” Martínez said.

Many governments and legislatures have expressed their opposition to the blockade as an attempt to economically strangle the Cuban people, and because it harms other countries as well, Martínez added, saying, “They have suffered the consequences of the extraterritorial nature of this cruel policy.”

She also mentioned the work of the Southern Cross brigade, including participants from Australia and New Zealand, who travel to Cuba every New Year, to celebrate the triumph of the Revolution, and learn about the reality here interacting with the population.

They denounce the illegal occupation of Cuban territory in Guantánamo by the United States, which has a large number of military bases across Asia and Oceania as well, added motivation for their participation in the event held every two years, in Guantánamo, to abolish all foreign military bases, sponsored by the Cuban Peace Movement (Movpaz) and other organizations here.

These groups advocate the decolonization of occupied territory in the Middle East and support anti-capitalist and progressive movements in Latin America, especially Venezuela, Martínez said, noting, “We know how important it is to preserve Latin America as a Zone of Peace, as declared in Havana during the 2nd

Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).”

The Friendship Institute’s director for Asia and Oceania says there is hard work to be done to increase the number of organizations and better channel the interest in Cuba, and unite these groups in an articulated force to oppose injustice around the world, adding, “Nevertheless, the road has been traveled. Now we just have to resist and confront the system of bourgeois oppression,” she concluded.