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Cuba Commemorates 58th Anniversary of Women's Organization

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We are Cuban women of the 21st century, as I recently read. We see our dreams on the horizon and are moving forward. We are not very different from the women who came before us. Our characteristics have stood the test of time, allowing us to accomplish so much of what has been achieved in the country.

Since the revolutionary war, underground and in the Sierra Maestra, Cuban women have shown our bravery, intelligence, and above all, the will to accomplish everything we take on. This is why the right to a safe, legal abortion, free of charge, has been in place for almost 60 years. We were the first country in Latin America to promulgate a divorce law, and sex education is provided beginning in elementary school. Gender equality is addressed in all environments, as is ending violence against women and girls.

We have accomplished so much. We could say we are a leading country when it comes to the victories of women, but this does not mean we are done. When we say that we see our dreams on the horizon, we know that as long as we continue dreaming, the horizon recedes and we have farther to go.

Being a revolutionary means more than defending the homeland. It implies changing, breaking barriers, and transforming. Vilma Espín is no doubt one of the most revolutionary women ever in Cuba. She struggled not only for her country's independence and freedom, but advocated for the rights of women throughout her life, as well.

She did so raising her voice, but also in action. On August 23, 1960, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was founded, an organization she led until her death in 2007, advocating for the full participation of women in society and the workplace, alongside the program of social and economic changes unfolding in the country.

Today on its 58th anniversary, the FMC has close to four million members and carries out activities across the

country to support families. In the Guidance Centers for Women and Families created by the FMC, educational and preventative work is done to provide assistance to women, children, older adults, and men in facing conflicts, be they related to violence, legal issues, family dynamics, or others.

Also available at these centers are classes and training that allow homemakers to participate in social life. Activities include community visits to maternity hospitals and schools to address responsible sexuality and teenage pregnancy. Staff is also involved in responding to anti-social behavior, including the detection of illicit drug trafficking and consumption, as well as prostitution.

Another effort of the FMC is the "Educate your child program" for mothers and their preschool children between the ages of two and five, to prepare these boys and girls for the school environment.

To accomplish all this, the FMC has a staff that includes social workers and other professionals to ensure that mothers and families can participate in activities and courses, and work for greater and better incorporation of women in society. There are those who don't like statistics, but in many cases these provide an added dimension to work carried out anonymously, giving isolated events visibility. In Cuba, women constitute 48% of all workers in the civilian state sector.

According to FMC General Secretary Teresa Amarelle Boué, also a member of the Communist Party of Cuba Political Bureau, Cuban women have excellent opportunities to work, participate, and lead. One example is that eight of every ten attorneys in the country are women.

At the end of 2016, 37% of all workers in the economy were women, constituting 63% of all technicians and professionals. Their participation in the non-state sector has been gradually increasing, Amarelle noted in a recent interview published in Granma.

In the healthcare sector, 78.5% of those practicing medicine are women; almost half of scientific researchers are female; and women occupy 66% of the most highly skilled technical and professional positions in the country – receiving equal pay for equal work.

On another front, legislation affords women special rights to pre and post maternity leave, and working mothers have the right to breastfeed their babies as long as they see fit.

Currently, women constitute 53.2% of deputies in the National Assembly of People's Power, 33.5% of delegates to Municipal Assemblies and 51% at the provincial level. Of the country's 168 municipalities, 66 have women leading their governments, as is the case in nine of the nation's 16 provinces.

Still moving toward that receding horizon, Cuban women of the 21st century have more battles to win. While the results of our efforts have been significant, with women's presence in Cuba ever more active and authentic, we continue dreaming.

In arenas devoted to achieving gender equality and ending violence against women and girls, being debated are issues related to stereotypes that persist in a society that remains patriarchal and machista. The aging of the population enters into the picture when inequalities in the responsibility for domestic tasks and home care are considered. Likewise, work continues to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality, which are low when compared to other countries of the region, but continue to be high given our standards.

Isabel Moya Richard, outstanding journalist and for many years director of the Editorial de la Mujer publishing house, said in one of her last interviews that the challenges facing Cuban women were many: "The first is that it is widely believed that we have already won it all. When we look at statistics and see the number of women in Parliament, the number of female scientists, female communicators, and that more than 70% of attorneys are women, etc, we fabricate an idea that distorts reality.

"We have been able to open the way in professions previously not considered appropriate for women. Now we are in a more complex time, that of confronting subjectivity, culture, value judgments and customs – much more difficult to change, since this is about canons deeply seated in the collective imagination, in social expressions:"

The road has been long, but productive, and it will continue to be so, with the horizon as our goal. The Federation of Cuban Women has reached its 58th birthday, and this new year of life is full of challenges, with much more to be

accomplished.

"The Revolution has, without a doubt some, in our population's feminine sector, a very big back, for that reason, from the first instants they were observed a series of activities with the Cuban woman's active participation. It was not anything new for our country. Our country can feel fortunate in many things, but among them, the first one of all, for the magnificent town that possesses. Here not alone the men fight; here, as the men, the women" fight.

A decisive force for our Revolution

"This unification of all the feminine sectors of the Revolution, is to constitute a force, an enthusiastic force, a numerous force, a big force and a decisive force for our Revolution."

Federation of Cuban Women, united in that word: Cuban

"And today the women meet and they constitute this Federation of Cuban Women, united in that word: Cuban, and united in that flag that you/they take in their hands. And they have united to work, to work and to fight; they have united for all the tasks that the Revolution brings us; they have united for the fight and they have united for the work; they have united to help to the homeland in any circumstance."

The Revolution has the Cuban woman

"For that reason we have the Cuban woman, the Revolution it has the Cuban woman! and it is task of the Federation to organize the Cuban woman, to prepare the Cuban woman, to help the Cuban woman in all the orders: in the social order, in the cultural order; elevating their preparation through courses, through publications; putting it aware of all the questions that are of interest for the woman; putting it aware of the questions of the women in the entire world, relating it from all over the world with the cultural and social activities of the women, making arrive to her from all over the world feminine publications, news from all over the world; and taking to everybody news and the Cuban" woman's publications.

Let us take place with joy this historical and promising day

"(...) that a single revolutionary woman that is not contained in the Federation of Cuban Women, doesn't exist and they will see how the Revolution will be able to have a force more, with a new organized force, with a tremendous social force and revolutionary. With the result that us, in today's day, in the same day that there you discusses, let us take place with joy this historical and promising day of the constitution of the Federation of Cuban" Women.

To put in activity the creative spirit

"And now, to work, to organize and to put in activity the creative spirit, the Cuban woman's enthusiasm, so that the Cuban woman, in this revolutionary stage makes disappear until the last discrimination vestige; and have, the Cuban woman, for their virtues and for their merits, the place that corresponds him in the history of the homeland."

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