
Cuba in the heart of Rosemari Mealy (II)

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Rosemari Mealy lived and worked in this island and helped build bridges. She herself has stood as a bridge: American, journalist, writer, Afro-descendant, revolutionary, a woman...

What are the most important achievements of Cuban Women?

Cuba as a nation continues to advance in many fields such as science, medicine, education, sports and culture. I would have to spotlight the current role that Cuba's female scientists are playing in the dreaded COVID 19 pandemic as they successfully navigate unparalleled terrain in producing the countries own home-grown vaccines:

Three fourths of the 175 staff at Cuba's National Medical Genetics Center (CNGM) are women. And women constitute 90% of the research team working on the Center's largest current project—unlocking the biological secrets of COVID-19 in the Cuban population. They are identifying particularly vulnerable groups and geographies, reviewing therapies applied and long-term sequelae of the disease, and contributing to ongoing vaccine research and trials. (3)

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), which just celebrated its 60th Anniversary recently announced another noteworthy achievement which also occurred during the COVID 19 Pandemic. In some amazing and successful organizing efforts with young people:

Despite the isolation. . .more than 10, 000 differentiated activities carried out by the FMC with young people, to exchange information about the consequences for cultivation, trafficking, possession, and consumption of drugs for health and the family. That is a massive achievement worthy of acknowledging. (4)

Since 2001, Cuba has been developing a new comprehensive education strategy for young people participating in employment programmes whose goals are education, health, and culture. Women make up the majority of graduates of the Teacher Training Programme: 71.7% are primary schoolmistresses. They also account for 62.2% of general basic secondary teachers and 74.9% of all teachers of computing. Girls are also in the majority in the

Social Workers Training Programme and constitute 77.2% of all those already in work. (5)

If you were to talk or write about the impact or effect the US blockade has on the Cuban society, specifically on women, how would you do it or how would you explain it?

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) is a major participant in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The US Blockade of Cuba interferes and will impact the ability of Cuban Women to meet the highly critical 2030, Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals as outlined specifically in Section 12. Which states in part that the realization of those goals must take into consideration the “different national realities.” Cuba’s reality is undercut by the draconian measures instituted in the Helms Burton Law.

The Commission reiterates that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs to be implemented in a comprehensive manner, reflecting its universal, integrated and indivisible nature, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting each country’s policy space and leadership while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments, including by developing cohesive sustainable development strategies to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The Commission affirms that Governments have the primary responsibility for the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional, and global levels with regard to progress made. (6)

Finally, I would concur and defer to the voices of my Cuban Sisters who consistently speaks out on the global platforms discussing in real time the collective burden of the impact of the blockade and succinctly:

Teresa Amarelle Boué, secretary general of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), denounced before the UN, in October of 2020, that the U.S. government's economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba constitutes the main obstacle to the realization of women's rights and the most harmful form of violence they face. (7)

Is there any specific story you would like to share, one that may have caused a deep impression on you?

I have so many special moments and stories that I could share. However, they would all make for an interesting memoir. We are talking about fifty-years that include untold visits. Many involved leading various US delegations, participating in conferences and festivals. However most memorable are those years that I had the honor and privilege to live and work in Cuba.

I will bullet a few of my highlights:

- Meeting and talking to El Comandante Jefe, Fidel Castro in Cuba for at least four times. Also being a part of both the 1995 and 2000 welcoming committees when he along with the Cuban Delegations visited New York. Each of those encounters left a deep and lasting impression.
- As an internationalist working at Radio Havana Cuba, (RHC), before and during the “Special Period,” and living as a Cuban, I witnessed and experienced many of the challenging economic circumstances that the entire nation was plunged into as a result of the diminished relations with and later the demise of the Soviet Union. The daily ordeal of acquiring and having access to basic and necessary items were compounded by the blockade.
- I also witnessed how my friends, neighbors and co-workers came together as a part of the collective spirit of the entire nation, to find new ways to adapt to new initiatives in response to the economy and the shortages by establishing stronger ways to create a more sustainable society. It was all Hands-on Deck for everyone. I lived in an environment where we took even more responsibility for each other, because we believed in the power of humanity. As a vegetarian, I expanded my recipes and shared with friends and neighbors who before were staunch meat eaters.
- I was so impressed in the way the vibrancy of Cuban culture was foundational to the Cuban psyche that melded and serves as a defense against in times of adversity.
- I have to say that another memorable moment was in 2011, on petition of ICAP, I was awarded the Friendship Medal by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba. I became so emotional when then, the President of National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, pinned the medal on me, I broke into tears.
- Finally another memorable moment was in 2019, when my book, Fidel and Malcolm X-Memories of a Meeting was launched in Spanish at the Havana International Book Fair. The book was translated and edited by my friend and famed Cuban poet, Rogelio Riveron, and is published by Letras Cubanas. The irony of the story here, the book cannot be sold in the US because of the blockade.

As a journalist which do you think are the differences in using the terms “embargo” and “blockade” when referring to the U.S policy towards Cuba?

Because of the extraterritorial nature or the extraterritorial reach of the Helms Burton Act, which is the law that seeks to deter foreign investment in Cuba (8) and imposes both sanctions and monetary fines on foreign states and foreign subsidiaries from trading with Cuba, the definition of Blockade in my opinion is more precise. The word Blockade best defines and describes what noted author, Gabriel Garcia Marques has said: *“The US blockade against Cuba is one of the worst violations of human rights...that has taken place in the 20th century”*. On the other hand, when writing or speaking how the Blockade not only imposes untold hardship on the people of Cuba and on third -countries’ state sovereignty by imposing economic fines on those countries for trading with Cuba, but the term also “embargo” as applied to the definitions of Section 4 is really a misnomer as written in the law.

Requirements of section 206. (7) ECONOMIC EMBARGO OF CUBA.

—The term “economic embargo of Cuba” refers to— (A) the economic embargo (including all restrictions on trade or transactions with, and travel to or from, Cuba, and all restrictions on transactions in property in which Cuba or nationals of Cuba have an interest) that was imposed against Cuba pursuant to section 620(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2370(a)), section 5(b) of the Trading with the Enemy Act (50 U.S.C. App. 5(b)), the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 (22 U.S.C. 6001 and following), or any other provision of law...(9)

(3) Reed G.A. (January 30, 2021). Researchers at Cuba’s National Medical Genetics Center: Pioneering studies on COVID-19. MEDICC Rev. 2021 Jan;23(1):12–7. Available at: <https://mediccreview.org/researchers-at-cubas-national-medical-genetics-center-pioneering-studies-on-covid-19/>

(4) United Nations Women. (March 4, 2021). CSW65 (2021). The Commission on the Status of Women adopted agreed conclusions on “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girl. Retrieved (n.d.). From <https://www.unwomen.org>

(5) Amarelle Boué, T. (2015). Secretary General of the Cuban Women Federation and Member of the Council of State of Republic of Cuba. 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59). Item. Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century. Retrieved (n.d.). From United Nations General Assembly (CSW59).

(6) United Nations Women. (March 4, 2021). CSW65 (2021). The Commission on the Status of Women adopted agreed conclusions on “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Retrieved (n.d.). From <https://www.unwomen.org>

(7) Ramos Lopez, G.L. (October 2, 2020).| The U.S. blockade is the most harmful form of violence against Cuban women. Retrieved (n.d.) From internet@granma.cu

(8) See Anthony M. Solis, The Long Arm of U.S. Law: The Helms-Burton Act, 19 Loy. L Int’l & Comp. L. Rev. 709 (1997) at pages 726-732.

(9) PUBLIC LAW 104-114 (MAR. 12, 1996). An Act To seek international sanctions against the Castro government in Cuba, to plan for support of a transition government leading to a democratically elected government in Cuba, and for other purposes. [H.R. 927]. Retrieved (n.d.). From <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-110/pdf/STATUTE-110-Pg785.pdf>

