Mariela Castro: Many Fall into the Campaigns' Trap

09/12/2019



Amid the National Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, CubaSí interviewed Mariela Castro Espín, Head of the National Center for Sex Education, a Cuban woman who has earned the right to talk about all these subjects.

—When do these subjects start to be thought over and addressed in Cuba?

—Women earn less than men in both Europe and the US. In Cuba, the first law approved by the Revolutionary government — February 7th, 1959 — one month after the triumph of the Revolution, achieved equal pay for men and women. That is to say that such inequality was no longer a problem for us after January 1st, 1959. Other issues remained as Revolutions do not have magic wands, unfortunately. In this regard, we need to work harder to find better solutions. But we have not stopped working, not for a second.

"Cuba was the first country to sign and later ratify CEDAW. This subject was addressed by the Federation of Cuban Women since its earliest days with the existing knowledge on the issue back then, which developed gradually in our nation. In this line, the Federation of Cuban Women was always progressive and quite active in the eradication of violence against women, boys, and girls. I, daughter of a member of this organization, can confirm that my mother cared personally for women with very complex emergencies when these situations were not subjects of debates around the world yet; not even scientifically. From 1980s on, the Federation of Cuban Women has had delegates responsible for the care and prevention of domestic violence. Over the years, they have done an excellent job. Indeed, they involved researchers who were

already working violence issues.

—And right now, what is the approach of the island's efforts?

—In recent times, we are trying to grouping more institutions and organizations from the civil society and the State in order to foster alliances, campaigns, actual actions and thus, see how we introduce them to politics, how to introduce them to legislative changes resulting from the constitutional change, which aims to reviewing this reality, among other things.

"The work is being done here. The State has addressed the issue. In the first international symposium against gender-based violence, sexual tourism, human trafficking, and prostitution, a special attention to all forms of violence was agreed to be later discussed at the National Sex Education and Health Program. Then, we submitted in September the proposal of a comprehensive sex education policy and sexual rights to the Ministry of Public Health. Within such policy, the program for the attention to violence-related problems is being considered. We are nowadays working the best we can and with new legislations looming. This is actually being considered as it is captured in the Constitution."

—However, we are the target of several questioning especially in social network.

—There have been attacks to discredit our institutions, people in general; for instance, me. **OnCuba** was the first to crusade against me, when I said in a documentary that there was no femicide in Cuba. But a Cuban journalist working for **OnCuba** focused on that little excerpt. And she quoted that alone, without the arguments. Then, there are people who switch their fashion chip on and adhere to every campaign coming from Miami and begin unfair, pointless attacks with deep ignorance, which by no means help in the development process of the subject.

"There is a lot of money on the table, especially from the US government to five major evangelical churches, which are the ones trying to undermine many initiatives. They are using this term of gender ideology, which was created by a Catholic bishop in the 1960s, precisely to discredit international advances in the field of women's rights and the Marxist view in relation to this subject. And our Revolution, as Fidel stated, has the right to defend itself, has the right to defend its social achievements, rights that have been endorsed in the Constitution and throughout the legislative system that is already being altered from the constitutional change. There are more than 50 laws on the list of those that are going to be reviewed; but commissions for each of them are to be created. It will be decided whether there will be a comprehensive law for the attention to violence against women or this law will be included in other laws. Work is already in progress.

—As a specialist and also an activist, as a Cuban woman, what is the main message to convey at this time?

—I think the first message is that we should study. We must be educated on this issue because there are many people who fall into the traps of campaigns to discredit our efforts. People who are poorly prepared and log in Facebook posting certain stuff. Besides, we must not act in isolation. We have to join forces, make alliances, because every time we make alliances and unite, we achieve effectiveness. We really make changes. Then, let's not follow the game of the enemies of the Revolution. Let's join forces, organizations and institutions that are really working, which are open to all the ideas committed to the revolutionary work that are truly sincere.

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