

Citizens' Observatory Against Discrimination

The *Citizens' Observatory Against Discrimination* (OCD), which is backed by the *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* and other civic organizations, represents a popular effort to create a broad network of assistance, legal advice and communication to serve any citizen who in any way may have been the victim of discrimination anywhere.

The OCD is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, civic institution whose main purpose it is to provide citizens with the civic and legal tools with which to defend their individual rights and personal integrity from any discriminatory or unjust action taken by an official authority or institution.

The impunity with which the administrative, judicial and political authorities act has created a daily saga of contradictions, excesses and even violations of current law. When combined with the fact that Cuban society lacks experience in civil matters and relative to rights, this places citizens in a considerably defenseless situation when dealing with the authority's actions.

The OCD offers citizens a network of mechanisms through which they can communicate, make accusations and/or receive legal advice regarding a challenge to any discriminatory act motivated by race, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, social origin or position, political or religious beliefs, or any other affront to human dignity and universally accepted values. At its crux, its desire is to

empower citizens. It is modeled after the Ombudsman's international experience; it embraces and models itself after the spirit of international, judicial entities that protect and promote respect for the human rights the Cuban government approved, particularly when signing the United Nations' Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural treaties.

The OCD is aware of the State's judicial responsibility in defending and promoting citizens' right—without making discriminatory distinctions. Yet, it also believes in the undeniable responsibility that civil society and citizens have in defending, promoting and generally exercising their citizens' rights.

Making available, by any means possible, public information about any discriminatory act, and defending its victims by utilizing national and international judicial mechanisms, should contribute to changing cultural and structural perspectives about our coexistence. Above all, it should make it obvious that the law should defend and guarantee the rights, dignity and integrity of citizens, and ensure that no person or institution remain above the law.

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