

Happy Anniversary

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The celebration of the third anniversary of the Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration's founding was very special indeed. The leaders, members and collaborators of this civic organization, which is headquartered in the El Vedado neighborhood of Havana, gathered to share satisfaction at its achievements and to reaffirm their commitment to their work during the International Year of African Descendants, and to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the massacre of the Independent Party of Color's members in 1912.

The State's panic and the repressive arrogance of the Cuban authorities became ever more evident. Just a few days before the commemoration, a couple of political police officers tried to warn the CIR's National Coordinator about the determination of "those on high" to interfere with any possibility that the event might proceed without a hitch. As usual, the threat was flatly and firmly rejected. At exactly 2:30 that afternoon, a police task force manned by a number of State Security officers, and a few National Revolutionary Police cars, surrounded the place. Their goal was to block the yet not arrived invitees from entering. After the officers forced two of them to desist, CIR member Guillermo Ordóñez Lizama, Executive Secretary of the Citizens' Observatory against Discrimination (OCD) arrived. The two officers posted at the building's entrance ordered him to leave the place. Ordóñez Lizama emphatically refused. The



Leonardo Calvo, National Vice Coordinator, CIR, closing the event



Police blocking Manuel Cuesta Morúa's access to the event

repressive agents allowed the activist to give his belongings to another of the invitees, in full view of the patrol car that would take him away, when he was detained. Instead, Ordóñez Lizama entered the place, shut the gate, and to the amazement of all who looked on asserted loudly: "I am inside! I'm in! The officers didn't dare do anything!" Manuel

Cuesta Morúa, President of the Progressive Arc Party (PARP) and co-founder of the CIR, arrived a few moments later. Upon being challenged by the officers, the social democratic leader informed them that there were only two possibilities for him: to go in or be arrested by them. Lieutenant “Ignacio” took Cuesta Morúa’s ID card and left, presumably to request a patrol car. After a long while, and as the invited activists and leaders came down the block to challenge this unacceptable act of repression, officer “Ignacio” came back, returned Cuesta Morúa his ID card (to everyone’s surprise), opened the gate for him, and said his last words that afternoon: “Have a good time.” So, the prestigious Afro-Cuban leader entered the CIR’s headquarters, his friends applauding, while all the officers were leaving, weighed by the embarrassment of a mission not accomplished. Yet, it never should have been strategized in the first place.

With everyone enjoying the satisfaction of once more seeing how the strength and dignity that characterizes the anti-racist activists was manifested, the commemoration began. In their opening statements, CIR National Coordinator Juan Antonio Madrazo Luna, and National Vice-Coordinator and ISLAS’ Cuban representative Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas, both reaffirmed the peaceful and civil nature of the project, as well as their determination to achieve—at all cost—their commitment to the historical justice deserved by Cuban blacks: equality and integration.

The leaders reviewed the numerous benchmarks achieved during the work year, among them the celebration of the first Race and Cubanness forum, the extension of the

CIR’s work to various provinces around the country, and collaboration with other important, independent organizations: the *Club de Escritores de Cuba* [Cuba Writers Club], the *Proyecto Nuevo País*, and the Progressive Arc and Cuban National Liberal parties.

Madrazo Luna and Calvo Cárdenas, their organization’s delegates to the First World Congress of African Descendants (in La Ceiba, Honduras, August 18-21, 2011), shared an account of the dilatory actions taken by the Cuban authorities to keep them from being able to participate in that event. Yet, Luna and Calvo Cárdenas also said that they felt well represented at it thanks to the wonderfully collaborative and solidaristic relations among anti-racist and African descendant organizations throughout the continent. The CIR leaders made assurances that the year 2012 would be filled with challenges, because in addition to their already existing work and project commitments, 2012 also marked the one hundredth year of the massacre of the members of the Independent Party of Color, in 1912, and the two hundredth anniversary of the Aponte Conspiracy, in 1812, all of which implied there would be an intense program of civic, academic and cultural events and actions throughout the year.

This festive and brotherly environment, filled with reaffirming convictions and commitments, once again revealed that the CIR’s leaders and members have a proven ability to face the persistently repressive actions of Cuba’s governmental leaders. Thus, started this fourth year of this organization’s existence. By its own right, the CIR has a relevant place in Cuba’s socio-political scene.