

A Strategy for an Independent Civil Society

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One of the most irrational acts committed by the Department of State Security (DSE) in its mission to defend those who have wielded power for 53 years was the arbitrary arrest of eight activist members of the *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* (CIR) when they were going to lay flowers at the bust of Mariana Grajales Coello (June 26, 1808–November 23, 1893), on another anniversary of her birth.

This operative was part of an escalated repression that grew proportionately to the failed practice (“supreme criterion and only true one,” according to Lenin) of cosmetic attempts to improve the system, which we already know doesn’t work. The statistical curve of growing repression has its highs and lows. One of those highs occurred about the time of the Pope’s recent visit, which was April 26–28.

The militarized design and organization of the masses, the display of troops from the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) and national revolutionary police (PNR), as well as by paramilitary forces on the streets, in churches, and even at cemeteries, in addition to hundreds of arbitrary detentions, limits on the freedom of movement of members of civil

society, and other violations of human rights and basic freedoms before, during and after the visit, serve as evidence of just how afraid Cuba’s leaders were at the possibility of an unstable social situation. Those in power, well aware of their unpopularity, are afraid of the likelihood of an explosive unrest such as the one that occurred in 1989 in Ceaucescu’s Romania occurring in Cuba.

A call for unity among various Cuban civic circles has increased. At this time of heightened economic crisis in Cuba, many democrats and defenders of human rights are asking themselves what should be done to confront these growing, repressive actions. Among the institutions in existence in a Cuban civil society that is unrecognized, denigrated and violently repressed, one finds the *Corriente Martiana* [Martí Current]; a patriotic, humanitarian and cultural institution at society’s service. Their vision includes a Cuba in which real respect is afforded to each human being’s full dignity through a State of Law, social justice, market freedom, adequately proportionate, participative, deliberative and representative democracy, a tripartite division of power and an independent judiciary.

It also includes citizens capable of combining freedom and responsibility, with a small and efficient government.

This institution is promoting a strategy that involves three principal directions for non-violent, civic action, to contribute to putting an end to irrational actions, and the irresponsibility of those in power, the latter legally and ethically inadmissible according to international standards for human rights. This strategy hopes to leave the Cuban state's confrontation with other States, its politicization, political leaders' double edged sword, and other vices, all of which favor those in power and hide reality, somewhere far beyond the binary nature of the State's unmoving, intransigent and repressive position versus that of Citizens.

- The first civic action is trying to increase the flow of information to the United Nations (UN) about violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms reported by victims, or by those the victims designate to do so, according to the U.N.'s rules and procedures.

To achieve this, since December 2011, the *Marti Current* has offered a service, "distance education for defenders of human rights in Cuba." The didactic materials are on two DVDs containing video recordings of the Basic Course for Defenders of Human Rights in Cuba meetings, which were first offered live. Yet, due to repressive actions, there being only one professor, and limited distribution possibilities, the information was subsequently recorded.

The recordings come with two Power-Point presentations: a summary of the course and information about how to notify the United Nations about human rights violations according to its rules and regulations.

The package includes information about a recommended methodology for how to best use it, a printable manual, corresponding U.N. documents and models for notification about specific and frequent violations, as well as instructions on how to fill out U.N. forms.

With these studies, the members of the *Marti Current* hope to raise the professionalism of the work done by those defenders, and improve their ability to report violations to the United Nations without needing intermediaries, and according to admissible criteria. An increase in the flow of information by this means is one more step that has been taken, along with one that has already been adopted collectively, thanks to groups and institutions active in civil society.

- The second civic action consists of presenting to the United Nations our society's independent, civil groups and institutions. A document containing 8 concrete petitions under Resolution 53/144 about human rights defenders is at the core of this presentation.

The first petition refers to including in the request to the members and potential members of the United Nations Council on Human Rights a reminder about a previous agreement that was made to adhere to corresponding, international pacts concerning improving the composition and commitment of that institution. There is insistence that the Cuban government comply with the resolution about human rights defenders (53/144), free prisoners incarcerated for dissident or oppositionist attitudes, guarantee the independence of the judiciary according to U.N. norms, and adjust the constitution, laws, and institutional and social practices according to international norms governing human rights.

There is a demand that the United Nation's rules and principles be applied both in Cuban prisons and at the workplace, the latter an area that is severely lacking with regard to the observation of the directives, principles and rules of the International Labour Organization (ILO), particularly its Agreements 87 and 98. Likewise, that the Cuban government comply with its process of adherence to international agreements concerning economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, and its optional protocols—which it signed on February 28, 2008.

Each civil organization elaborates an adherence protocol in which it can communicate its reservations and add specific requests. This document's submission to the United Nations will make it available for scrutiny by international public opinion. A number of institutions have already finished preparing its adherence protocols. It is expected that this strategic step will bring about U.N. intervention on the flip side of all of this—Cuba. The U.N. has permitted the Cuban government to occupy the second highest position on the Council for Human Rights, constantly praising its educational and public health systems, and praising its sending of technicians and professionals to third countries under the guise of an internationalism that veils its sale of services provided by neo-slaves. Yet, the United Nations does not comment upon or demand a cessation of systematic and institutionalized violations of fundamental rights and freedoms in Cuba.

This is not about trusting a seriously dysfunctional organization. This strategy takes into account third countries interested in improving their rights and freedoms situation, beyond whatever interests motivate them, so they can abandon their bilateral strategies,

whose implementation have yielded valid but poor results.

Historically, the Cuban government's response to the situation of third countries has been "dirty" diplomacy. Instead of responding to these points or criticisms with concrete solutions, it employs the diversionary tactic of casting Cuba as the victim of having its sovereign national rights violated by its eternal enemy—the world's imperialist nations—and repeats accusations of violations committed by its accusers. This recalls memorable repudiation marches carried out in front of the diplomatic headquarters of Poland, the Czech Republic and Spain, when these presented motions condemning Cuba for human rights violations at the former Commission for Human Rights. Despite the fact this entity named special reporters, they were never able to enter Cuba.

International institutions, governments, and those interested in improving the situation of rights and freedoms in Cuba will be able to address their requests to the United Nations, which according to its own mission, is the most authoritative agency to take this on.

- The third civic action charges citizens with citing the Cuban government and informing it of public, international and national opinion, and of what minimum and essential reforms they consider should be carried out in Cuba to get it out of its crisis.

These reforms are contained within the ten points of the proposal "Por una Cuba Martiana"[For a Martí-like Cuba], which was presented to the authorities in 2008, and has still not received even a formal response—a blatant violation of national law. Our peti-

tions and the civic movement making the demands are the result of this unanswered proposal. They base their thinking on the ideas of the nation's founding fathers, José Martí particularly, as well as on the original ideas of the *Generación del Centenario* [Generation of the Centennial] (1953) that carried out the Revolution (1953-59), which was betrayed by the Castro brothers and their followers. Another foundational concept is based on international norms concerning human rights. The ten points included are:

1. Agriculture and food supply
2. Housing
3. Public transportation for passengers
4. Self-employment and small businesses, informal markets and economic crime
5. Education
6. Workers' rights
7. Decentralization: NO to excessive centralization
8. The Constitution and branches of government
9. Justice and legality
10. Political prison and exile

Detailed information about each point can be found at <http://corrientemartiana.wordpress.com/>

Actions developed through this campaign include the distribution and verbal communication of these proposals to more than 2000 citizens. Responses from this sampling indicate a high probability that national consensus can be achieved. In early 2011, a survey of 220 people was conducted in the provinces of Havana and Artemisa about the 10 points. Results confirm a highly probable consensus. All those who know and share the proposals are invited to place at the entry to their homes a sign reading "CUBA MAR-

TIANA," as a symbol of the fact that their nation-building project does not coincide with the one imposed by the government. This is a form of non-violent struggle. Another plan is to pray the "Prayer for a Martí-like Cuba" on the last Sunday of each month, so that everyone can commend to God's hands in his or her own way the civic campaign's intentions. For months now, the prayer has been invoked at the Catholic Church in Cabañas (Pinar del Río).

Aside from those already mentioned, any initiative proposed by a diversity of groups and from many places will be included as part of the social movement, so long as they are non-violent. On the subject of how necessary unity was, Martí warned: "O alzar juntos la red o vivir, rebeldes inútiles, bajo la red" [Either cast united the net or live, futile rebels, under it]. It seems the moment for us to unite to finally cast the net on Castroism and totalitarianism has arrived. If it has not yet been possible by the means that have been attempted, then it appears the time has come to employ successful strategies from the U.S. civil rights movement, a movement about which Martin Luther King, Jr. concluded that: "in the first place, blacks lacked unity. Some groups were trying to do something to escape that unjust situation, but they were doing so each on its own; there was no coordination, nor unity of objectives, no unified strategy for achieving everyone's goals."

It is time to coordinate actions, unify strategies according to our shared objectives, so we can achieve—despite our diversity—a unity of action that will permit us to progress towards democratization and legally protected human rights. Let us cast the net before it is too late!

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