

Urgent Mensage Actions Against Freedom and Democracy

Havana, October 9, 2013

The members of the Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration and Citizens' Observatory Against Discrimination, organizations that promote the fundamental rights of Cuban citizens, make an urgent call to governments, institutions and people committed to freedom and democracy to use all their efforts and influence with Cuba's authorities for them to put an end to and prevent the injustice, permanent humiliation and violence it employs against peaceful, civil activists, to degrade their human dignity and integrity. This is merciless injustice, humiliation and violence that are directed specifically at Afro-descendant activists in Cuba's diverse and growing civil society.

We address this call and promote this campaign to the global community because this is the struggle of all decent, democratically inclined people who want reason to triumph and dialogues take the place of brutality. Yet, we address specifically to people, organizations, national and global institutions that work on behalf of the rights and participation of Afro-descendants all over the world.

The fundamental rights of all Cubans are violated in Cuba. We all suffer the humiliation and violence that exudes from a structured State that expresses hatred and disdain. The memorable beating endured by actress and activist Ana Luisa Rubio is another example of the hate crimes one can chalk up to the revolution-

ary saga. Yet, there is an earlier, inherited story that justifies and makes even more perverse the repression of Cuban Afro-descendants' civil and cultural resistance. The States hates difference, but it hates black difference even more, even though it claims to have liberated blacks. It hates this different sort of blacks, the kind that fill island prisons, victims of racist precepts like dangerousness, public disorder and scandal.

There are those who today serve as civic symbols (they are not the only ones), among them Sonia Garro Alfonso and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz, both of them already condemned before any legal trial. They are there because they are the victims of an abusive and racist State that is attempting to keep them caged up with long prison terms because the civil and cultural resistance that is increasing in marginalized areas of the revolution has been criminalized. There are other names and other symbols: Damarys Moya Portieles, Iván Fernández Depestre and Iván Hernández Carrillo, who are all constantly enduring a mistreatment, humiliation and violence in prison or on the streets that is enacted upon them by a regime unable to reasonably process a new social phenomenon: Cuban Afro-descendants are joining forces, organizing and enacting their own resistance.

For us right now, this is about an urgent and structural battle to defend blacks that are different and engaged in this struggle. For us, this struggle against the humiliating repression

of different blacks is the crucial frontier in the struggle against the humiliating repression of all Cubans. When we accept the value of people who are marginalized and deprived of their rights, we are accepting the value of all Cubans who suffer repression and humiliation imparted by a State that even in the twenty-first century is unable to understand that people who are different matter.

We launch this campaign for the dignity of all Cubans—regardless their skin color—and of Afro-descendants—their difference being important—who hold dear the value of these five Afro-descendants as civic symbols of suffering, their scarred bodies serving to illustrate hegemony's long history of humiliation.

This campaign against the additionally racialized form of this repression is also fundamental. With it, we want to also denounce the hypocrisy and discrimination of this history and Cuba's judicial system. The charges against Sonia Garro and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz are not only outrageous, given the Cuban civil society's peaceful tradition, but also reflect the obvious judicial and moral double standard applied in judging social discourse. When quasi-police like mobs kick, stone and throw other dangerous objects at people, these acts don't qualify as attempts to assassinate peaceful, pro-democratic activists. Yet, those who for years have endured the harshest of the regime's relentless attacks—an endless stream of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment—are accused and judged of these very same crimes. The victimizers are made out to the victims.

Disorder and vulgar language full of obscenities and impudence are daily visited upon Damarys Moya Portieles, Iván Hernández Carrillo and the Ladies in White by police authorities and fascist mobs—these symbols do not lose their moral authority. Yet, the prosecution's charges against Sonia Garro Alfonso, Ramón Alejandro Muñoz and others try to make us believe that the government is protecting society

from social indecency and discourse's marginality. These are easily manipulated today to reinforce their racist underpinnings and focus on black difference. Given this fact, one can't help but wonder at the detail that the media hardly ever portrays these echoes of official disorder and vulgarity.

Yet, this attempt does not seem credible when one considers the permanent presence of Rapid Response Brigades—a typical euphemism employed by fascist mentalities—which have been illegally organized and armed with Sticks, Cables and Clubs, by order of the regime. These groups focus on difference's character assassination.

Who legally and morally judges the intellectual authorities and perpetrators of these hateful acts, illegality, impudence and crimes? Is indecency legitimate when it is committed in the Revolution's name?

Today, we hear about law, a year and half after Sonia Garro and Ramón Alejandro Muñoz's harsh and illegal incarceration began. There is an attempt to criminalize Afro-descendants who have devoted their energies and talents to working with children and feeding the elderly caught in the Revolution's marginality. There is an attempt to preach to us about morality when civil and cultural resistance appeals to the language (common in Cuba) of those who have and aspire to nothing.

These five symbols of Afro-descendant resistance, who even through their skin color express the resistance of an entire, shattered society, deserve the support of well-meaning Cubans, the world and the global, Afro-descendant community. This is not just an intellectual debate that questions the words, credibility and conflicting opinions of an educated elite, but a battle on behalf of the accumulated pain of the black bodies of a nation that are moving forward their forceful resistance against those who after 54 years do not speak truthfully about this population's exclusion from history.