



*Figure 1: Former and Current Presidents Fidel and Raul Castro, Leaders of the Cuban Revolution (Dec. 2015)*

## **A Report on Cuba**

**By Lee Robinson – Rep. of the African Awareness Association Inc.  
December 23, 2015 – January 19, 2016  
Written On - February 9, 2016**

### **Objectives/Goals:**

I went on this with the intention of resolving some outstanding issues, concerns and tasks that needed to be addressed at this particular time, while continuing to show our support and solidarity with Cuba by visiting, as well as learning and bringing something back from this trip to share with our communities (African) and the solidarity movement in general, under the name of African Awareness Association. I traveled 'unlicensed' and spent 3 days in Cancun, Mexico, and 22 days in Cuba. The nature and results of this trip came about from the decision to postpone the 'Freedom Ride – Black History, Educational & Cultural Travel Challenge Tour to Cuba,' (December 18, 2015 to January 3, 2016). We have rescheduled this tour to: Saturday, July 23, to Tuesday, August 2, 2016, leaving from Miami, FL. We hope that you will join us to see Cuba for yourself. I am available to visit and speak to your community, organization, university, or church on this visit and on Cuba.

### **Financial Cost/Investment of Trip:**

I invested several thousand dollars on this trip. I was able to personally raise 30% of the money from friends and supporters.

## **Political Analysis, Activities, Outstanding Issues and Recommendations**

### **Political Analysis and Concerns:**

*Figure 2: International Community wants to do business with Cuba, but is being hampered by the U.S. blockade (Dec. 2015)*



\*The U.S. blockade has tightened its grip on Cuba in economic, commercial and financial areas. There is a perspective in Cuba that the present living conditions and hardships are comparable to the conditions during their "Special Period" of the 1990s. The implementation of improved international trade, exporting, importing products and services to and from U.S. and others countries could not be

implemented. Here are some of the problems and issues resulting from the ongoing U.S. blockade:

1. Cuba can't use U.S. dollars in its international financial transactions and operation accounts; many of the trades deals could not be implemented unless others are adopted that would finally allow Cuba to freely export and import products and services to and from the United State; use America dollars in its international financial transactions and operate accounts in that currency in third countries' banks and have access to credits and financing from private entities and international financial institutions.

*Figure 3: Small private businesses are welcomed, as here in Central Havana*

*(Dec. 2015)*



2. In October 2015 a 1.116 billion dollar fine was imposed on the French bank Credit Agricole. Additionally a 1.710 billion dollar fine was imposed on the German bank Commerzbank in March 2015 for doing transactions with Cuba and other States.
3. In October 2015 the secure messaging system SWIFT cancelled a service contract; the first payment of the American company Sprint to initiate direct telephone calls was withheld; as well, several other banking transfers for the operations of charter flights were withheld.



*Figure 4: Private vendor working at a Flea Market (Dec. 2015)*

4. The already insufficient Cuban food purchases from the U.S. were significantly diminished last year by the U.S. Congress. Each purchase must be authorized by a license; the granting of credits is not allowed; Cuba is forced to pay in cash in advance through banking entities of third countries and is not allowed to use its own vessels to transport those products.



*Figure 5: New Year Celebration with the elderly in Guanabacoa, Havana (Jan. 2016)*

5. The imports of the medicines and the medical equipment that Cuba needs are also conditioned, since 1992, by the U.S. Law. Cuba is required to report on the final recipient of the medicines it acquires and is not allowed to make direct payments, but only through third parties and in a currency other than the U.S. dollar, involving additional difficulties, delays and costs.

6. On September 2, 2015, the company Elekta confirmed that it will not be able to supply to the National Institute of Oncology and Radiobiology or any other hospital in Cuba the radioactive isotope Iridium-192, which ensures the normal functioning of the brachytherapy equipment that is indispensable to offer higher quality and accurate cancer therapies, because its purveyor, the U.S. company Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, refused to sell it to Cuba.



*Figure 6: A team of Cuban doctors working to keep the population healthy (Dec. 2015)*

7. In June last year, the U.S. company SIGMA Aldrich refused to supply to the company Quimimpex the products, services and technical information which are indispensable to the chemical industry; and the U.S. firm Columbiana Boiler Company informed the afore-mentioned company that

it was not allowed to export the cylinders necessary to transport the chlorine destined for the treatment of water.

8. Seventy seven per cent of all Cubans have been suffering the blockade since the day they were born. The shortages and deprivations that it causes to all Cuban families cannot be overstated.

After more than half a century, the blockade has caused a loss to the Cuban economy of 833.755 billion dollars based on the price of gold. At current prices, it amounts to 121.192 billion dollars, a figure of enormous proportions for a small economy like Cuba.



*Figure 7: Cuban mother and her family eating dinner (Jan. 2016)*

9. Cuba will introduce 4-year degree programs at the university level; historically they have been five- and six-year programs. With this change, it is hoped to introduce professionals and specialists into the workforce earlier in an effort to contribute to economic development. Also, teachers will be trained in a single subject area instead of two subject majors.

10. Students who earn honors in any subject, in their pre-university high school, can be admitted directly to the university without taking admissions exams.



*Figure 8: Students studying Engineering and Medicine in Aires Caro, Havana (Jan. 2016)*

11. One of the major effects of the blockade is a housing shortage for the Cuban people; this is causing the youth of today to not to get married and have children. There are often two to three generations of families living in one house. This is one of the chief reasons why there are some citizens (mainly youth) who are seeking to leave Cuba for a better economic situation. A study on this issue and on the youth has indicated that this desire among the young people to emigrate has reached its peak and is now on a decline, since the result of economic reforms within Cuba that offer more opportunities for a greater earning capacity.

*Figure 9: In Havana - people going to work and school by bus early morning (Jan. 2016)*



## Observations and Recommendations

12. There is a sense among some Cubans that ideological training and development among the youth has been weakening, and that the Communist Party is playing a less vigilant role in addressing some of these difficulties and problems that are facing the people. Historically, the Party has always taken the lead in this area. This situation could be a cause of some bad decision-making and resultant problems for the Cuban people.



*Figure 10: Preparing and developing future leaders of Cuba (Jan. 2016)*

13. There are food shortages at times and shortages of certain foods; price control has been placed on vegetables, which otherwise can be very expensive. Cuba imports a large amount of its food.
14. Cubans now have easier access to obtaining a passport and can travel to any country that will give them a visa. The passport is the only requirement Cubans need to travel.
15. The human damages the blockage has caused are inestimable. Seventy seven per cent of all Cubans have been suffering the blockade since the day they were born.
16. From my observations, the LGBT community is active, and there is a Punk Rock presence in various communities (including the Afro-Cuban population).
17. In the face of the many reforms and changes that have taken place in Cuba, the people still are committed to hold on to their Revolution, Socialism and their Government. I didn't see or feel any real resistance to the path that the people have chosen. **We must intensify our support!**

**\*Note: Number 1 – 8 can be found in the Gramma International (English), Oct. 30, 2015**

### Activities:

1. I was picked up at the airport by representatives Vladimir Falcon and Brother Hugo of ICAP, the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People. They issued me a visa as a special guest.
2. I had two informal meetings with ICAP (Vladimir Falcon and Leima Marinez Freire, ICAP's director of North American relations). This led to an interview on the subject of 'U.S. – Cuba Relations,' and the African Awareness Assn. tour being postponed to July/August 2016.



*Figure 11: Lee in solidarity with ICAP (Rep. Vladimir Falcon (left photo)/ Leima Marinez Freire (below), Dec. 2015)*

3. ICAP offered and arranged an interview for me to discuss the current state of U.S. and Cuba relations with Professor Dr. Nestor Garcia Iturbe (Professor, Specialist on the History of Cuba and U.S Relations). I filmed this presentation/interview on Tuesday, December 29<sup>th</sup> at the office of ICAP. It will be shared with the people in the U.S. and the various solidarity groups/ networks of Cuba, progressive organizations and churches, that wishes to have a copy of the DVD at a cost \$15 to help pay for the production and shipping cost.





Figure 12: Lee interviewed Professor Dr. Nestor García Iturbe (Specialist on the History of Cuba and U.S. Relations (Dec. 2015)

4. I spent 2 days with some students from the U.S. who are studying at ELAM and was able to do a video interview with one of the students on the subject of 'living in Cuba and studying at ELAM.' This student is a five-year medical student. I will share this video with the public in the U.S.



Figure 13: Lee Robinson with youth and workers from the community in Havana (Dec. 2015)

5. I visited Gloria Rolando for a day, where I was invited to a production of the U.S.-based Zenon Dance Company at the Teatro Martí on January 17, 2016.



Figure 14: Filmmaker Gloria Rolando (working on next project) and Zenon Dance Co. from U.S. in Havana. (Jan. 2016)

6. I visited medical institutions and was able to learn from them and their realities.
7. I spent time with my family, on the ground visiting relatives, friends, and people from all over, various municipalities of Havana -- workers, professionals, athletes, soldiers who fought in Angola, etc.) Airs Carro, Havana is a very interesting section in which to visit Africans.



Figure 15: A day at work in Havana (Jan. 2016)



### Outstanding Issues and Recommendations:

1. From observation and discussions, it seems clear that in the area of health, the blockade is contributing to conditions of hypertension, obesity and diabetes among the people. Also, housing and food production (more food and more variety) are concerns of the people. There are various imported TV programs and music from Mexico and the U.S.
2. We need to build a strong, conscious, well organized 'Africans for Cuba Solidarity Network' inside the U.S. from within the African/Black Communities to join the fight of ending this racist, unjust and illegal blockade against the Cuban people, along with travel restrictions.

Figure 16: Africans in solidarity with Cuba and enjoying the Afro-Cuban music (Jan. 2016)



I am asking all supporters and friends to support African Awareness Association's Tour (July 24 – Aug. 2, 2016), Cuba's International Solidarity Conference in Dominican Republic (July 28 – 30, 2016) and AAA's interviews from Cuba on this past trip (available on DVDs). We also ask you to help in the building of Cuba's Awareness & Appreciation Day in Richmond, VA, March 15, 2016 by African Awareness Association and A-APRP (GC).

## MEET US & EXPLORE CUBA

In Santiago de Cuba from JULY 23 to AUGUST 2, 2016 – On Our Black History Educational, Cultural & Solidarity Tour from Santiago de Cuba to Havana – If interested, call African Awareness Association at (804) 549-7492 or (202) 714-9435, or Email: [africanawarenessassociation2@gmail.com](mailto:africanawarenessassociation2@gmail.com) . Cost: **Before April 1, 2016 is \$1,650, after is \$1,750. Final Payment must be in by May 1, 2016.** Come and checkout the Carnival in Santiago de Cuba, Cuban national holiday of July 26 and the international Hip Hop Festival in Havana and learn more about Cuba and its reality. Send your \$50 application fee to: AAI, P.O. Box 4433, Richmond, VA 23220, or make a donation to support the work of African Awareness.

