

‘People in the U.S. have a lot to learn from Cuba’s Families Code’

written by Gloria Verdieu
January 28, 2023



Delegates to the Second World Meeting of Friendship and Solidarity in Havana, Cuba, November 2000. SLL photos: Gloria Verdieu

Talk by Gloria Verdieu of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee at the webinar “What We Can Learn from Cuba’s ‘Code of Freedom’ for Families,” hosted by Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha on Jan. 22.

I remember my first trip to socialist Cuba in November 2000. I attended the Second World Meeting of Friendship and Solidarity. I have the poster that was given to all participants. It has a quote from José Martí: “The world is a beautiful temple where all men on earth fit in peace.”

I knew then and I know now that “all men” translates to “all of humanity.” We can all fit in peace on this beautiful earth — our home.

The reason I went on this trip was that I wanted to see what socialism looked like.

The conference was attended by people from over 60 countries condemning the U.S. blockade. I came with a delegation; buses took us to the many programs on our packed schedule. We visited factories, polyclinics and communities, where we learned about the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). There were cultural performances in these communities.

The daily events gave the delegates a chance to experience what life is like with a government that is concerned with the needs of the people rather than profits.

The delegates gathered daily at the Karl Marx Theater, within walking distance of our hotel. When I went walking, I did not feel any restrictions, though I did not wander too far.

We didn’t know if President Fidel Castro would speak at any of the conference gatherings. I figured not – with thousands of people there, it would be a big security

risk.

During our final meeting at the Karl Marx Theater, Fidel appeared on the stage. No bulletproof glass barriers, no extra security checks that I was aware of.

Fidel began to speak; we were given devices for interpretation. People listened and listened until it was time for discussion. Fidel gave lengthy, thoughtful answers to questions, not only from the delegates, but from Cuban workers.

At one point a child ran on stage and Fidel gave him a hug and said something that I could tell was a show of affection for him and his family.

Healthcare in Cuba vs. U.S.

One of the many things that had an impact on me was when we visited one of the polyclinics.

There was a group of doctors at the clinic, and one explained to us how closely connected doctors are with the communities they serve. They know who smokes, drinks, takes drugs (prescribed or not), struggles with mental illness, which teenagers are sexually active - intimate details that individuals voluntarily share with their doctors. Doctors know the health of families in their community through home visits and family counseling.

Doctors were told things that we in the U.S. would not dare tell our primary health care provider, because it could mean higher monthly costs for those who have insurance coverage, or changing health care providers, which means transferring all your health history to another doctor. You can be denied coverage or even lose your job because of a chronic health issue.

Health care is a huge problem in the U.S. There have been many reforms, many updates to the system, and yet there are still millions of people who have minimal or

no health insurance.

I continue to learn what socialism looks like and how participatory democracy works. I was impressed with the way Cubans at home and abroad were involved in the decision-making process of updating Cuba's Families Code. Some 6.5 million people participated, a sincere display of democratic centralism.

As an organizer of the Socialist Unity Party's Prisoners Solidarity Committee, one of the many things that registered with me in Cuba's new Families Code is its promise to promote happy, healthy families. Everyone is included (great-grandparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in-laws, close partners), from the most senior members to the youngest, and everyone in between. You choose your family.

It also promotes the right to a family life free from violence and unprovoked stress. A family life that values love, affection, solidarity and responsibility.

I recently attended a day of solidarity with formerly incarcerated prisoners and families in California's capital, Sacramento. So many things are wrong with the "criminal justice system" in the U.S., which is why we know that it cannot be reformed or updated; we must shut it down.

You can see and feel the grief and stress of the families with loved ones in prison, and of those recently released, who are having a difficult time transitioning to life outside. Housing, healthcare, jobs and community acceptance are some of the obstacles that formerly incarcerated individuals face.

There are over 2 million people in prison in the U.S. Many more are detained in immigration centers and holding cells awaiting litigation, affecting millions of families.

Cuba: 'We encourage family to stay involved'

Gerardo Hernández, who was one of the Cuban 5 political prisoners held in the U.S., and is now head of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, highlighted the differences for families in Cuba: “Our purpose is to help. We talk with the family, we encourage the family to stay involved, because it is understood that the family suffers when a loved one is incarcerated.

“Prisoners need not be discriminated against because they went to jail. Our objective is not to make a repressive action against those persons but to help those persons, who are victims themselves in many cases.”

Cuba’s neighborhood CDRs number 138,000, with over 8 million members, and continue to work on programs and solutions to the problems of petty crime, drugs and mental illness.

The United States incarcerates more of its youth than any other country in the world. Most states continue to use outdated and harmful “training school” models, confining children in remote, prison-like facilities cut off from their families and communities.

Overcrowding and violence, prosecution of youths as adults, and the long-term consequences of incarceration on the individual’s chances for success in adulthood are huge controversies.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel stated, “before our people and the world, that in Cuba no one under 16 years of age is imprisoned!”

People in the U.S. have a lot to learn from Cuba’s Families Code, especially from the process in which it was passed. All citizens over 16 years of age were eligible to vote in the Families Code referendum.

We must support Cuba by demanding the U.S. government end the more than 60-year blockade and remove Cuba from the so-called “State Sponsors of Terrorism”

list. We must demand normalization of relations and an open dialog with Cuba.

We must learn about socialism and Cuba's participatory democracy. Socialism is the path to a better world for everyone.



