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# LGBTIQ activists from Cuba and U.S. exchange on struggles and challenges

written by SEMlac Cuba

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The group of visitors was interested in the functions and agenda of the existing networks in Cuba, spaces for socialization and challenges that still persist. Photo: SEMlac Cuba

Defending their rights and denouncing religious and political fundamentalisms are common goals shared by LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer) activists from Cuba and the United States.

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, HSH (men who have sex with other men) and LGBTIQ activists from the United States exchanged about the approval of the Families Code in the Caribbean nation, the forms of organization of activism, and homo-lesbo-transphobic violence.

The meeting was held on May 8 at the National Center for Sexual Education (Cenesex), as part of the 16 Cuban Days against Homophobia and Transphobia, which are held until May 20 in Havana and Santi Spíritus.



Experiences, challenges and forms of struggle are common points of LGBTIQ activists from Cuba and the United States. Photo: SEMlac Cuba

Melinda Butterfield, trans activist from the U.S. organization Women in Struggle, recalled her previous visit to the country, since she has been a member of the solidarity movement with Cuba for 30 years.

"I came before and after I transitioned. Now we have been motivated by the victory of the Families Code and we want to bring people from our communities to learn about this law and, when they return, they can educate about the need to end the blockade on Cuba," said Butterfield.

The group of activists visiting Cuba was interested in the process of approving the

Families Code and how it attracted the support of the Cuban government.



LGBTIQ activists from the United States were interested in the process of approving the Families Code and forms of activism in Cuba. Photo: SEMlac Cuba

"In the United States the government is against us; in various states, laws are being passed that seek to annihilate and eliminate us. That's why we're here, to learn how you have accomplished all of this," said lesbian activist Elizabeth Toledo of the Socialist Unity Party.

Gustavo Alberto Pi, a specialist from Cenesex, highlighted the support of the Cuban state as a crucial element in the process of approving the code. A struggle that was not easy, he said.

"The approval of the Families Code is the result of political will and decades of education and awareness by institutions such as Cenesex and civil society," he explained.

"From a legal point of view, it's a precious document. It is not only a code that recognizes the right to marriage and adoption by LGBTIQ people. It is a law that protects the rights of all people in society, particularly the most vulnerable, and settles a historical debt with gay and trans people," added Alberto Pi.

The group of visitors was also interested in the functions and agenda of the existing collectives in Cuba, spaces for socialization and challenges that still persist.



Members of the TransCuba Network shared some points of their agenda, among which stands out the work for the respect of the right to identity of trans people in prisons. Photo: SEMlac Cuba

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women and HSH pointed out some of the issues they work on and the forms of organization of their networks, present in all the country's provinces and in most of its municipalities.

At the meeting, it emerged that, unlike TransCuba and HSH, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network faces the challenge of not having its own budget.

"Since they are not considered a population at risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, lesbians cannot access international financing dedicated to the prevention of the HIV epidemic," explained Alberto Pi.

Other challenges shared by activists from both countries were violence and religious fundamentalisms, which in the case of the United States have seeped into politics and the media, increasing hate speech.

"There are many differences between the various states in the U.S. In some the rights of LGBTIQ people are being taken away and they are making it illegal to exist in public. In a few states we maintain our rights, but there is no national protection policy and the national government refuses to intervene," said Melinda Butterfield.

"Now there is a lot of hate in the media and that means more violence everywhere. New York, where I live, is considered a safe city, but fascists are coming into our spaces and as a community we have to stand up to them. In Florida and Texas, it's worse," added the trans activist.

"Here we are also victims, especially trans people. We suffer police harassment, family abandonment and social discrimination. That often forces us to drop out of school, turn to sex work as a way to survive, and many live with HIV," said Alexandra Hernández Naranjo, coordinator of TransCuba in the Habana del Este municipality.



The activist Teresa de Jesús Fernández warned about religious fundamentalisms that defend an aggressive anti-rights agenda. Photo: SEMlac Cuba

For her part, Teresa de Jesús Fernández, national coordinator of the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, shared some of the points on the agenda developed by the network, among them: the approach to sexist violence, internalized lesbophobia, the recognition of lesbian parental families, the exercise of reproductive rights of lesbian women, the visibility and reality of their rights, bullying at school, work and in the community.

“Our fundamental objective is to contribute to the transformation of society and to dismantle patriarchy,” the activist concluded.

Source: [SEMlac Cuba](https://www.semlac.cu/2023/05/12/activistas-lgbtq-de-cuba-y-estados-unidos-sobre-las-luchas-y-desafios/)



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