



Supplement

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**Havana Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Conference,  
for Democracy and Against Neo-Liberalism**

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**Havana Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Conference,  
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## **Cuba Is Not Alone**

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The Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Conference, for Democracy and against Neo-Liberalism took place in Havana, Cuba from November 1 to 3 with the participation of 1,400 delegates from 95 countries, according to Fernando González, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).

For three days, activists from different social movements, political parties and social organizations from all over the world met in Cuba to express their solidarity with the Cuban people and their repudiation of the blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States in 1961 as well as the escalation of hostilities from the Donald Trump administration towards the island.

The meeting was convoked and organized by ICAP and the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC), along with the Cuban Chapter of Social Movements and the Continental Conference for Democracy and against Neo-Liberalism under the slogan "Hands Off Cuba."

According to a communiqué released by ICAP, the purpose of the gathering was "to be a real contribution to confronting the current counterrevolutionary offensive of U.S. imperialism, to the search for the widest possible unity of progressive forces in the region and to strengthening militant solidarity with the just causes defended by the peoples. In the current political situation, marked by the aggressiveness of the Trump administration, new ways will be sought to reinforce solidarity with these causes in the world, mainly in our region."

### **Opening Speeches: Fernando González and Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla**

In his opening speech, Fernando González, Hero of the Republic of Cuba, dedicated the event to the memory of Fidel Castro, the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution "whose concepts, ideas and personal example constitute our guide in the sure path to victory."

He highlighted that Cuba has gone through 150 years of struggle and has 60 years of Revolution

and "here we are, standing, building the socialist project we dared to dream, with the protagonism of the people."



"The United States threatens and slanders Cuba so that they don't have to recognize their failure in overthrowing our Revolution and they misrepresent the altruistic medical cooperation Cuba offers in more than 80 nations. There is no better tribune than this space, to confirm that Cuba will not renounce nor ever betray its principles nor solidarity with the other peoples of the world," stressed González.

For his part, the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parilla, who also participated in the inauguration of the conference, stated that Donald Trump's government is the main threat to international peace because of its increasing interference in domestic affairs of the peoples of the world. He also underlined that "there will not be sustainable development without the Southern countries'

right to development or without social justice."



Rodríguez Parrilla thanked the activists for the solidarity Cuba has received and stressed that "hard times" are coming.

He referred to the latest measures taken by the U.S. against Cuba, such as limiting travel to the islands, the increasing human rights violations and smear campaigns.

"The U.S. needs to blame Cuba for their complete failure in Venezuela and they need to justify toughening the blockade. We do not have any participation or involvement whatsoever in the protests taking place in Latin America other than the example of the Cuban Revolution," the Foreign Minister said.



He also denounced the unjust imprisonment of former Brazilian president Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva, the actions of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the activation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) ) against Venezuela under "absurd pretexts."

Also present in the opening session were: José Ramón Machado Ventura, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba; and Esteban Lazo Hernández, President of the National Assembly of People's Power and President of the Council of State, as well as the former President of El Salvador, Salvador Sánchez Cerén; the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves; and other outstanding personalities. A cultural performance by the children of the Colmenita theatre company was also enthusiastically received by the participants in the event.



Day One started with a panel in which prominent intellectuals and activists shared their views on the current developments in Latin American and world politics and the role in it of social and workers' movements as well as the challenges facing the left. Interventions followed from the floor in which people from all regions of Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, Quebec and the world spoke.





At mid-day there was a wave of discussion and solidarity organized outside the Convention Hall where delegates from around the world spoke to the media and one another.







### Bonding with the People



In the evening, delegates were invited by the Committees in Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) from the district of Barbosa, on the outskirts of Havana, to join them in an Anti-imperialist Tribune. As the buses carrying the delegates arrived in Barbosa, Cuban flags and slogans were hanging from buildings, windows, balconies and along the streets, creating a festive atmosphere. Hundreds of local residents were out in the streets waiting to greet the delegations and to take contingents to the different CDRs. There is one CDR per block and, at each, neighbours explained to the visitors what CDRs do, how they work and are organized. They also explained how the Cuban people organize in general for daily life and for the defence of the Revolution. Children from the community recited poems and gave presents and drawings to those visiting their CDR. Neighbours also offered the food they traditionally cook when there is a CDR celebration and exchanged experiences with the delegates who expressed their gratitude for such a warm welcome.





Fernando González, President of ICAP, then addressed all those gathered in a central area. The musical group Pupy y Los que Son, Son performed while videos were projected on a big screen and people danced and discussed with one another late into the evening.







The tradition of holding Anti-Imperialist Tribunals was started on the island at the end of 1999 and the beginning of the year 2000, when the Cuban people fought for the return of Elián Gonzalez -- the Cuban child whose mother had taken him illegally to the U.S. and following an accident in which she died, he was found at sea and taken to the U.S. His father started a legal battle to bring him back to Cuba. This battle was initiated by Fidel Castro, and backed by the entire Cuban people, the people of the United States, Canada and the world. It was in the course of this fight that Fidel Castro launched the "Battle of Ideas." The Anti-Imperialist Tribunals became its venue. They were carried out every Saturday in different neighbourhoods, to demand the return of Elián which finally happened in June 2000, and was considered a big victory of the Cuban Revolution. With time, the Anti-Imperialist Tribunal was built in Vedado across from the U.S. Interests Section building with many historic demonstrations converging there. That Tribunal is currently undergoing renovation and the tradition continues.

The celebration of unity and friendship with the Cuban Revolution in Barbosa certainly showed the enthusiasm of the residents and guests from abroad for the Revolution and confirmed that Cuba Is Not Alone.

## Day Two of the Anti-Imperialist Gathering



During the second day of debate, a main panel in the morning included participation by Ismael Drullet, from the Cuban Chapter of Social Movements, who stressed the importance of unity and solidarity to face imperialism and capitalism; Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent



and the Grenadines, who expressed the support of all those present for the Venezuelan people and the role of the Caribbean countries in anti-imperialist solidarity; Manuel Bertoldi, from Argentina, who highlighted the importance of the uprisings taking place across Latin America; Félix César Navarro Miranda, Bolivia's Minister of Mining and Metallurgy; and a representative of the People's Republic of China, who highlighted the importance of the relations between China and Cuba and said that his country will "continue to support, as always, the just cause of this Caribbean Island, its sovereignty and socialism according to its national conditions."



**Notable speakers on Day 2 included Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (left) and Gail Walker, Executive Director of IFCO-Pastors for Peace.**

In the afternoon the work was divided among different commissions:

- Commission 1: Solidarity with Cuba and other just causes;
- Commission 2: Peoples in the face of free trade and the transnationals;
- Commission 3: Decolonization and cultural war. Strategic communications and social struggle;
- Commission 4: Youth: strategies and continuity in struggles;
- Commission 5: Democracy, sovereignty and anti-imperialism; and
- Commission 6: Integration, identities and common struggles.

The reports of the Commissions were later presented to the plenary session.





**Top: Commission 1 meets at the Latin American School of Medicine; bottom: meeting of the youth commission, where Indigenous youth from BC and Manitoba and others intervene from the floor.**

Discussions in the Commissions were informative and raised the many challenges facing the peoples. For instance, participants from Puerto Rico shared the situation of their country, the oldest country still under colonial domination. María Lourdes Santiago, vice-president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, in the Decolonization commission, explained in detail the many problems Puerto Rico faces every day, economically and culturally, but she also strongly stressed that "after 121 years of domination, we still speak Spanish" and that after Hurricane Maria, which devastated the country and in which many lives were lost, the Puerto Rican flag, their own flag, waved in every corner.

"Puerto Rico is the great debt Latin America still has with colonialism," she said.

Solidarity with the cause of the Venezuelan people, demand for the return to Argentina of the Malvinas occupied by Britain, and independence for Guadeloupe, occupied by France, as well as solidarity with the struggles of the Chilean, Bolivian, Honduran, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Sahrawi and Palestinian peoples were also expressed on numerous occasions throughout the event.

One of the highlights of the Anti-Imperialist Forum was the announcement that more than two million signatures had been gathered in Cuba in just 14 days demanding the freedom of former Brazilian president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, imprisoned arbitrarily and unjustly by the current neo-liberal president through the manipulation and corruption of legal proceedings.







Signatures were also gathered in the agora outside the Convention Centre.

The letter highlighted that solidarity with Cuba, "in every stage of the Revolution, was a duty of every man committed to democracy and the peoples' sovereignty, in the struggle against neo-liberalism and the perverse blockade imposed by the U.S. government on the island for more than half a century."

Chants of "Lula Livre!" accompanied the proceedings from start to finish.

Great enthusiasm was also expressed for Cuban solidarity actions with the world, sending doctors to every corner where they are needed, to those who do not have any other access to medical care. There was a standing ovation for these doctors, some of whom were present at the conference, either invited to participate especially or as delegates from their own countries. This was a special moment in light of smear campaigns the U.S. is carrying out against them and their missions.

### Day Three of the Gathering



The day started with reports from the Commissions, the presentation of the text of the final declaration and interventions from many delegates and the adoption of the declaration.

In the afternoon, the concluding session of the Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Conference, for Democracy and Against Neo-Liberalism began with the resounding applause and standing ovations that greeted the arrival of Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba; President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez; President Nicolás Maduro of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; José Ramón Machado Ventura, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba; and Esteban Lazo, President of the National Assembly of People's Power and the Council of State.



A Declaration of Solidarity with Cuba was read by Gail Walker, Executive Director of the U.S.-based Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO)-Pastors for Peace, and daughter of reverend Lucius Walker, who in 1992 started the caravans of Pastors for Peace to Cuba.

"We support the construction of a prosperous Cuba, based on José Martí's principle of who rises today with Cuba, rises for all times," read the declaration, which also demanded the end of the blockade against Cuba and repudiated the implementation of the *Helms-Burton Act*.

Walker had expressed earlier that as part of the people of the U.S., they felt an even higher commitment with Cuba.





**Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez address the closing session.**

President Maduro spoke next. His speech expressing the defiance of the Venezuelan people to the hostile actions of the United States was met with prolonged applause and a standing ovation.

President of the Republic of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez then gave the concluding speech of the event. He began his remarks, "A special greeting to all who resist and have come to the Cuban capital, which has always been, and will be, a meeting point for those who defend peace and solidarity among peoples."



"The new generation of Cuban leaders, trained and educated by the historical generation of Fidel and Raúl, are revolutionaries, socialists, faithful to Fidel and Martí," he said to prolonged

applause. "[W]e will not yield a millimetre in our positions in favour of independence, sovereignty and social justice. And as a link with the peoples who struggle and resist, we will always uphold solidarity as a fundamental principle, to which we owe so much," he added.

It was without a doubt an end which forged a new beginning. Invigorating and optimistic, there was a certainty that Cuba is not alone and, also, a consciousness in Latin America and the Caribbean that the peoples preserve the peace and solidarity to achieve a more prosperous region; a region that puts an end to all the various forms of colonialism still existing, a region of people's democracy and against neo-liberalism. Anti-Imperialist unity is without doubt the key to victory.

*(Photos: TML, ICAP)*



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## Final Declaration



From this Cuba with such solidarity, the first free territory in the Americas, recognizing the heroic resistance of its people and the victories attained over sixty years of Revolution, we have shared our struggles and hopes, we the 1332 representatives of 789 social and people's movement organizations, of solidarity movements, networks, platforms and regional and global organizations, of political parties, parliamentarians, religious groups and intellectuals from 86 countries.

We come from every corner of the world, with a long history of solidarity actions facing imperialist aggression against the Cuban Revolution, committed to all just causes and as part of the efforts for unity in action and coordinated struggle, to meet here in Havana at the Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Encounter, for Democracy and against Neo-liberalism, from the first to the third of November of 2019.

We are experiencing a new moment in history. People casting their ballots, people in the streets and on the social networks demonstrating with their votes and protests, the waning of the oligarchic right-wing's conservative imperial offensive and neo-liberal restoration in alliance with religious fundamentalism, media power capital and transnational enterprises that, in the hands of predatory U.S. imperialism, excludes broad sectors of the population, destroys honest work, life in



harmony with nature and places the human species at risk.

The peoples are demonstrating that it is indeed possible to overthrow the imperial offensive which aims to resort to criminalization of social protest, the confinement and displacement of populations, the murder of social and political leaders, femicide, the persecution of the leaders of progressive governments and the judicialization of politics.

Times of hope have opened up. Unity is vital and constitutes our duty; mobilization is the order of the day; organization of the people is the imminent task; and integration is the strategy that will lead us on to victory.

At this crucial time, we agree to:

1. **Take on** our Declaration of Solidarity with Cuba approved at this Encounter, mobilizing in permanent actions which are intensive, systematic and which have high media impact against the escalated aggression of the Yankee Empire, as part of the "Hands off Cuba" international campaign.
2. **Demand** lifting the strengthened, criminal and genocidal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the U.S. government, and to support the Resolution to be presented at the United Nations General Assembly on the 6th and 7th of November of 2019, confident of yet another overwhelming victory for the international community.
3. **Denounce** the different kinds of threats and aggressions on all sovereign governments that refuse to serve the hegemonic power that seeks to install military bases in their territories and usurp their strategic resources.
4. **Reaffirm and defend** the validity of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.
5. **Denounce** the grave risks in store for Latin America, the Caribbean and the world, the decision to activate the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR in its Spanish language acronym) oriented towards militarily backing the U.S. government's zeal to revive the Monroe Doctrine.
6. **Express** our steadfast solidarity with the Bolivarian and Chavist Revolution, the civilian-military union of the people and their legitimate President, Nicolás Maduro Moros, who has steadfastly defended Venezuela's sovereignty from all types of aggression by the United States government and its allies taking measures against the true diplomatic representatives of the Venezuelan government. Support the dialogue with sectors of the opposition to maintain peace in Venezuela.
7. **Intensify** our mobilization in the demand for the immediate freedom of comrade Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, victim of lawfare, which has as its aim the persecution and incarceration of left-wing political and Latin American progressive leaders.
8. **Congratulate** the people of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for their electoral victory and President Evo Morales Ayma on his re-election, as a result of measures benefitting the people and economic growth. Likewise, **we denounce** the attempts at coup d'états and destabilization unleashed by sectors of the opposition, instigated by the United States, against peace and public safety in Bolivia.
9. **Condemn** the attempts of the U.S. administration to destabilize the government of Nicaragua and reiterate the right of its people to Peace.

10. **Demand** independence for Puerto Rico, a Latin American and Caribbean nation submitted to over a century of U.S. colonial domination, where its people victoriously rally in the streets against annexionist government policies.

11. **Express** our steadfast solidarity with the nations of the Caribbean in their legitimate claim for reparations for the repercussions of slavery, and for the fair and differential treatment in dealing with climate change, according to their special circumstances and their situation of greater vulnerability.

12. **Support** the historic demand of the Argentinian people to recover the Malvinas Islands, territory which legitimately belongs to them.

13. **Denounce** those governments that, following the dictates of Yankee Imperialism and the recipes of the International Monetary Fund, violently impose their neo-liberal shock policies on their peoples, deepening social injustice and especially affecting the most vulnerable sectors in society. Energetically condemn the use of force and repression to attempt to crush the just claims of the social and people's movements.

14. **Defend** the decision of the people of Chile to bravely revolt in the streets to open the great avenues against the repressive and anti-popular policies of the government, and condemn the use of torture, violations, mutilations and death of Chilean citizens at the hands of the repressive bodies of that country.

15. **Condemn** the repression in Ecuador and the toll in human lives for that brother country which is dealing with the neo-liberal *paquetazo*.

16. **Reject** the pro-imperialist government of Jair Bolsonaro, subservient to the interests of the United States and engaged in reversing the advances attained in that sister nation, destroying the processes of integration and all progressive and left-wing expressions in the region.

17. **Support** the right of the Colombian people to peace and defend the full implementation of the Final Agreement to achieve it, demand that the government respects the lives of former combatants and political and social leaders. We call on the return to the Dialogue Table with the National Liberation Army.

18. **Express** our deepest solidarity with the sister people of Haiti in their struggle for social justice, historic reparations and honorable life.

19. **State** our support to the struggle of the people of Honduras and their legitimate *revindications*.

20. **Congratulate** the people of Argentina and their President-elect Alberto Fernández for the well-deserved victory at the ballot boxes, bringing the defeat of neo-liberalism and the recovery of hope and dignity for that nation.

21. **Commend** the government of Manuel López Obrador and its contribution to the unity of Latin America and the Caribbean, in defense of the principles of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty.

22. **Express** our support and solidarity with the Frente Amplio of Uruguay which defends the continuity of the advances attained on behalf of their people in the last three 5-year terms.

23. **Denounce** the meddling of imperialism in the domestic affairs of countries in Africa and the Middle East, the aggression and wars unleashed, under the so-called crusade against terrorism, for the control of natural resources in those regions. Reject the coercive economic measures against Zimbabwe.



24. **Support** the historic cause of the struggle of the Sahrawi and Palestinian peoples for their right to self-determination.
25. **Demand** the end of imperialist intervention against Syria and the full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity.
26. **Welcome** the process of rapprochement and dialogue between the two Koreas. **Condemn** the unilateral sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.
27. **Reject** all forms of discrimination and violence on the grounds of gender, skin color, religious belief, sexual orientation or any other manifestation that runs counter to the dignity and integrity of persons and to call for solidarity with their agendas of struggle, and to recognize the contributions of the women's and feminist movements in the emancipatory processes.
28. **Defend** the aboriginal peoples rights for their culture, territories, traditions and ancestral customs. Express our support for the Afro-descendant communities and the minorities in their struggles for their demands.
29. **Recognize** the protagonist position and commitment to struggle of the youth as the persons who will faithfully continue the emancipatory and internationalist legacy of our forefathers.
30. Strongly **condemn** the current anti-immigrant policy of the governments of the United States and the European Union, as well as of all fascist, xenophobic and racist manifestations.
31. **Denounce** the current McCarthyist crusade of the U.S. government and the anti-communist campaign occurring in Europe.
32. **Call for** global struggle to defend natural resources, biodiversity, food sovereignty and security, Mother Earth and social conquests and rights.
33. **Strengthen** the response to cultural and symbolic warfare whose battleground is the dispute over the subjectivity of human beings, connecting the media war on the Internet with the digital social media, feeding the networks of truth against the offensive of lies spread by neo-liberal imperialism.

Therefore:

We reiterate the importance of moving forward to build anti-imperialist unity among the left-wing political forces and the social and people's movements in regard to plurality, diversity and the sovereign right of the peoples to freely choose their own form of political, economic and social organization, convinced that unity is the only route leading to victory in the faceoff with the principal enemy of the peoples: Yankee imperialism and that of its allies.

We thank the people, the Government of the Island of Liberty and Unity and the Cuban Chapter of Social Movements for their hospitality and eternal solidarity. We shall continue at your side, committed to your social project and with the promise of divulging the truth about this invincible Revolution.

This Encounter reaffirms the will to fight of our peoples and constitutes a formidable incentive to continue moving forward, aware that we shall continue resisting until victory.

Faced with the plans for the disintegration of imperialism and the conservative, oligarchic and neo-liberal right wing, we oppose it with the integrating sovereign and honorable plan of our peoples. Let us unite to demand our right to development, to life and to the future. Anti-imperialist unity is the tactic and strategy leading to victory.

*Mr. Imperialist: Hands off Cuba!  
We the people continue the struggle!  
¡Hasta la victoria siempre!*

(November 3, 2019. Official translation by ESTI. Photo: TML.)



## **The Cuban Revolution at 60 -- International Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia**

### **Halifax Hosts Largest Gathering of Off-Island Specialists on Cuba**



**The conference opens on October 31, 2019.**

An important three-day international conference -- The Cuban Revolution at 60 -- was held in Halifax from October 31 to November 2. Cuban Ambassador to Canada Her Excellency Josefina Vidal, one of the featured speakers at the conference, noted that it was the most important such event to take place outside of Cuba.



**The Cuban Revolution at 60  
International Conference  
Halifax, Canada  
31 Oct — 02 Nov, 2019**

It was planned by two leading Canadian Cuba experts at Dalhousie University, Dr. John Kirk and Dr. Isaac Saney. Previously in 1989, Kirk organized a successful international conference which took the measure of the Cuban Revolution after its first 30 years. "This year not only marked the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution," noted Kirk, "but it was also a time of historic transformation on the island: leadership change, constitutional reform, and a complex process of economic developments. This was a good opportunity to discuss the progress Cuba has made over the past 60 years and perhaps more importantly, to analyze current developments."

Kirk and Saney were supported by a team of community and student volunteers led by Sheila Savage, Marilyn MacMullin and Jeanie Kimber who oversaw logistics and venues and made sure the buses -- and the program -- ran on time. "We couldn't have done it without them," Kirk explained.

More than 250 people participated. Academics and experts from Cuba, Canada, Mexico, Britain and the U.S., as well as students, community activists and friends of Cuba all contributed to the success of this historic conference.

Forty leading Cuba specialists from Cuba, the UK, Latin America, Europe, the United States and



Canada took part in a series of panels to assess the successes and challenges of the Cuban economy, Cuba-U.S. relations and Cuba's international relations. Other panels focused on climate change and ecological challenges facing the island, as well as social change, including issues of race, gender (in)equity, health and sexual diversity. The panel discussions, keynotes, and informal exchanges between the participants assessed the successes and challenges of the Cuban revolution and socialist system and the challenges that lie ahead (see reports below).



**Key presentations at the conference were delivered by (left to right) H.E. Josefina Vidal, Cuban Ambassador to Canada; Dr. Alon Friedman, neuroscientist at Dalhousie University Brain Repair Centre; and Jeffrey DeLaurentis former U.S. Ambassador to Cuba.**

The first day of the Conference began with a message of greeting from Halifax Mayor Mike Savage. In his message, Mayor Savage expressed his admiration for Cuba and also the deep ties between Cuba and Nova Scotia which have been mutually beneficial, and which he hoped would continue and deepen.

This was followed by the opening panel, entitled "Cuba and the Cuban Revolution: Overview and Personal Reflections."

On the second day, November 1, the panels discussed the evolution of the Cuban revolution over 60 years, climate change and how Cuba is addressing this issue, and how Cuba is adapting to social change to ensure the rights of its citizens moving forward.

The second day also featured a much anticipated keynote address on the so-called "Havana Syndrome" by Dr. Alon Friedman, a medical doctor and researcher at Dalhousie University, who led a team of researchers funded by Global Affairs Canada to investigate the cause of the symptoms reported by U.S. and Canadian diplomats in Havana in late 2016. Without any evidence, the Canadian government had already blamed the Cuban government. This keynote was the first time Dr. Friedman publicly presented the findings of this investigation (see report below). The problem was not some "sonic attack" by the Cuban state, which was the disinformation spread by the imperialist media and, according to Dr. Friedman, blown out of proportion. Dr. Friedman remarked on the full co-operation provided by the Cuban Ministry of Health and expressed the hope that the working relations established between Canadian and Cuban researchers will continue.

In the discussion to end the first day's proceedings the main points brought out are that the Cuban revolution at the end of 60 years is renovating itself, particularly on the economic front, in the present conditions. The social solidarity of the people is constantly being strengthened, both within Cuba and through Cuba's internationalism.

The day's events were followed by a evening reception on November 1 at Halifax City Hall hosted by the Nova Scotia Cuba Association (NSCUBA), a community organization working for the past 30 years to build ties with Cuba, as well as a tree-planting ceremony where Halifax Mayor Mike Savage and Ambassador Vidal toasted the long and productive ties between Nova Scotia and Cuba. The relations between Nova Scotia and Cuba go back to 1903, when the first Cuban embassy was opened on Canadian soil in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, to facilitate trade in the fisheries.



The major topics addressed the third day of the conference were the Cuban economy, U.S.-Cuba relations, Cuba's international relations, and a closing panel looked at the future. As well, the keynote speech was given by former U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Jeffrey DeLaurentis.

The panel discussion on the Cuban economy brought out that the economy has always faced great difficulty as a result of the U.S. economic blockade and sanctions.

This was followed by a panel discussion that focused on U.S.-Cuba relations, highlighting the ability of the Cuban people to withstand the U.S. pressure on the country for over 60 years.

Developing on this theme, in the keynote presentation, Jeffrey DeLaurentis spoke candidly of his time as lead negotiator for the U.S. side during the Obama presidency, and the huge efforts put into normalizing relations between the U.S. and Cuba. He stated that once the announcements were made by the presidents of Cuba and the U.S. on December 17, 2014 to normalize relations, he and his counterpart, Josefin Vidal, worked hard to complete 23 agreements and launch 17 dialogues on topics as varied as human rights and properties that were expropriated by the revolutionary government in Cuba. DeLaurentis underlined that when the new Trump government came into power this work was stopped and today U.S.-Cuba relations are at an all-time low. Still, he expressed confidence that the negotiations marked a turning point. And given the broad support for engagement with Cuba among members of the U.S. administration, the Pentagon, and people in the U.S., Mr. DeLaurentis said he hopes that in the not too distant future, Cuba and the U.S. will achieve normalized relations to the benefit of both peoples.

The final panel discussion looked at Cuba's ongoing survival, its development and defence of its sovereignty.

The conference concluded with congratulations to all the organizers, who were roundly applauded for putting on a timely and important event and urged to organize another in the near future.

The conference website -- [cuba60.ca](http://cuba60.ca) -- was created and managed by yet another Canadian Cuba specialist, Mark Rushton. Now that the conference is over, the website will continue to host and make publicly available for the next year many of the papers and presentations delivered during the conference.

A number of scholarly books are also expected to be published out of the conference.

Support for "The Cuban Revolution at 60" conference was provided by the Ford Foundation, the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the Social Sciences and the Humanities Research Council, the Washington Office on Latin America, Dalhousie University, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Saint Mary's University, the Office of the Mayor of Halifax, the Canadian Network on Cuba, Dalhousie Global Health and NSCUBA, among others.





**The opening of the conference, featuring (left to right) remarks from Halifax Mayor Mike Savage, conference organizer Prof. John Kirk and and a bagpipe greeting.**



**Prof. John Kirk, Mayor Savage and Ambassador Vidal toasting the longstanding friendship between Nova Scotia and Cuba, November 1, 2019.**



**Reception at Halifax City Hall, November 1, 2019. Right: Conference organizer Prof. Isaac Saney addresses the reception.**

*(With files from conference press releases. Photos: D. Salas, S. Kimber, W. McLernon, Cuban Embassy)*



# Lead Negotiators Look Back on Attempt to Normalize U.S.-Cuba Relations

Jeffrey DeLaurentis, the ambassador to Cuba designated by the Obama administration, was intimately involved in the two-year process that led to the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba under that administration. He offered his personal reflections on that experience during a keynote address to "The Cuban Revolution at 60" conference held in Halifax. He recalled that, the early afternoon of June 16, 2017, he sat in his office in Havana and watched TV as recently elected U.S. president Donald Trump ripped up what he called the Obama administration's "terrible and misguided deal with the Castro regime."



DeLaurentis remembers "watching all our hard work evaporate. And I knew in my gut it was going to get much worse."

Twenty-one days after Trump's speech in Miami, DeLaurentis left Cuba. As he made his way through a reception line of the embassy's household staff, he recalls that, "after shaking the first hand," he broke into tears. While he acknowledges it wasn't "very diplomatic" of him, he notes that, after six months of stoically watching the new U.S. government dramatically reverse course on Cuba, "I could no longer hold in my reaction."

It had been a long journey from December 17, 2014, when DeLaurentis delivered the news to 50 embassy staff that -- after 18 months of secret negotiations -- Washington and Havana had agreed to try to develop a new, less hostile relationship with one another. "The applause" that day, he says now, "was deafening."

It had been an even longer personal journey for DeLaurentis, who arrived in Cuba for his first of three assignments in 1991 believing that the U.S. policy of "isolation and pressure" would lead to the "desired result," only to realize quickly that that policy was not in the long-term U.S. interest.

Although he told his audience in Halifax that the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba has now "descended" to its "lowest point in decades" and that it will likely get even worse as Cuba becomes a U.S. election issue for Trump once again, he remains optimistic for the long term, in part because of the "real conversations" that began in 2015-16. "While we didn't go far enough to make [the changes] permanent," he says, "we created the conditions to return to the table."

Josefina Vidal, Cuba's lead negotiator, now ambassador to Canada, in her presentation offered "personal reflections on the process of rapprochement that took place between the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2017." She told the Conference that she has dedicated more than 25 years of her professional life to U.S.-Cuba relations and that what happened during that brief period was "the only thing totally different that has happened in our bilateral relations for 60 years."

In 2015, early on in the negotiations, she recalled that an interviewer asked her if the ongoing process of rapprochement could still be reversed. "My response then was that, 'of course, that was possible'" she said. "Recent events proved it right... unfortunately so," she added. She said that "the deep differences that exist between us will last and the normalization of ties with the United States will always be a complex and prolonged process, that we may never fully reach."



Nonetheless, she still believes "it is possible to develop a civilized coexistence between both countries," she said.



The relations improved when they did, she said, because the Obama government finally "recognized the legitimacy of the Cuban government and its historical leadership," did not impose conditions on Cuba nor demand concessions to its domestic and foreign policy, and treated Cuba as an equal. While the U.S. did not abandon its goal of ultimately imposing its will on Cuba, "negotiations and dialogues took place based on respect and reciprocity. Both parties undertook the negotiations in a constructive spirit, willing to find solutions to outstanding problems and identify areas of common interest in which the two countries

could cooperate for mutual benefit."

The elephant in the negotiation room, of course, was the ongoing, nearly 60-year-old U.S. blockade, which could only be ended by Congress. "I have to remind you," Vidal told the audience, "that the total lifting of U.S. unilateral measures of economic coercion preceded similar processes with other countries."

Cuba, she said, had a "realistic recognition" of Congress' role in ending the blockade, but also understood "the wide use that the President could make of his prerogatives to implement [the embargo] in a flexible way. That is why we insisted permanently on this point."

What the two countries achieved in just two years, she says, was "not irrelevant," and it demonstrated that a "new type of relationship based on respect and equality was possible."

There was still much work to do to improve those relations, she added, when along came Donald Trump. Just as the Obama administration had used its executive powers to improve relations, the Trump administration "has dismantled almost everything that was done with the Obama administration... Trump has even gone further, implementing measures that are unprecedented for their level of aggressiveness and scope," including activating Title III of the *Helms-Burton Act* and even attempting to cut off fuel supplies to Cuba.

Today, she points out, the U.S. embassy in Havana is "practically inoperative" and "there are no official contacts beyond the formal ones that exist at a low level, not even to deal with matters of the highest priority."

Despite all of that, Vidal says she sees the future "with serenity and still with some optimism, I would dare to say... As the Cuban Foreign Minister recently stated, we hope this will be a temporary situation, a low moment."

While the two sides will eventually need to work to "restore and recover many things dismantled by the current U.S. government," Vidal says even that will not be enough. "The current setback reconfirms that the will and the executive powers of a U.S. President are not enough; that in order to ensure the long-term irreversibility of an improvement of relations, deeper changes are necessary in the American political context, including in the embargo legislations."

(Cuba60.ca. Photos: D. Salas)

# The Havana Syndrome: An Answer from Science



**Dr. Alon Friedman addresses the conference on November 1, 2019.**

Dizziness, blurred vision, memory loss, problems focusing... Something serious seemed to be affecting U.S. diplomats in Havana in late 2016 and 2017. But what? And who -- or what -- was responsible?

The new Trump administration, without evidence, blamed the Cuban government and hinted darkly U.S. diplomatic personnel had been targets of "sonic attacks" using a previously unknown secret weapon.

That was the first of many theories put forward to explain what was happening -- from mass hysteria to the call of the Indies short-tailed cricket. Most were debunked; nothing was proved.

But U.S. diplomats weren't the only ones reporting symptoms. Some Canadian diplomats complained as well and, in the spring of 2018, Global Affairs Canada commissioned Dalhousie University's Brain Repair Centre in Halifax to investigate and report back.

On November 1, Dr. Alon Friedman, the Brain Repair Centre's lead researcher on the project, discussed the findings in a keynote talk at "The Cuban Revolution at 60" conference.

The Dalhousie researchers -- 15 principal investigators and their teams -- began by trying to replicate the results of a preliminary study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania. The UPenn researchers reported that what had happened to the U.S. personnel represented a "new syndrome that resembles persistent concussions," but they were unable to identify its cause.

The Halifax researchers wanted to take the next step and figure out what had actually caused the symptoms.

They began by testing the Canadian diplomats who'd reported the symptoms using a multi-disciplinary approach for studying brain injury, including new methods of brain scanning. Perhaps most importantly, they also performed before-and-after scans on the brains of eight other diplomats who had been posted to Havana during the time of their study.

All those who had spent time in Havana showed similar damage to distinct brain regions, which are associated with memory consolidation, concentration and the sleep-wake cycle.

Friedman -- an Israeli-trained medical doctor with a PhD in neuroscience -- recognized what he



was seeing on the scans from his own research 30 years before. "There are very specific types of toxins that affect these regions of the brain," he explained. Those include insecticides, specifically organophosphate pesticides as well as other organophosphates -- neurotoxins that actually work by inhibiting the actions of cholinesterase, a key enzyme required for the proper functioning of the nervous system.

But that raised a critical next question. How had the diplomats come into contact with those neurotoxins?

While there were potentially nefarious explanations -- a sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway in 1995, the poisoning of Korean leader Kim Jong Un's half-brother in 2017 -- both involved single high-dose exposures that didn't explain what had happened in Havana.

"It was like a detective story," Freidman recounts. The researchers explored various potential avenues of explanations, tested them and found them wanting.

"With the help of Dr. Google," Friedman joked, they eventually connected the dots back to a very public mass fumigation campaign the Cuban government itself launched in 2016 to combat a major outbreak of mosquito-borne Zika virus in the Americas, including in the Caribbean.

Toxicological analysis of the Canadian victims confirmed the presence of a pyrethroid and an organophosphate, two compounds used in the fumigation products the Cubans had sprayed.

Using the Canadian embassy's own records, the researchers also discovered spraying had been carried out inside and outside their residences. The facilities were sprayed far more often than expected -- sometimes every two weeks. And the researchers also found a correlation between the number of fumigations performed at a diplomat's residence and the seriousness of the symptoms they reported.

This brought the researchers to their working hypothesis. "We report the clinical, imaging and biochemical evidence consistent with the hypothesis of over-exposure to cholinesterase inhibitors as the cause of brain injury," the study concluded.

That isn't the end of it, of course. More research needs to be done, including figuring out how to better understand the danger levels of the various toxins and, of course, there is still the public health concern. Who else might have been affected, including Cuban citizens working at the embassies, living around the same neighbourhoods or involved in the spraying?

The good news is that Dr. Friedman has met with Cuban health professionals and they are currently working together to determine those next research steps.

(Cuba60.ca. Photo: D. Salas)

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## Panel Discussions

The opening panel of "The Cuban Revolution at 60" conference held the evening of October 31 addressed "Cuba and the Cuban Revolution: Overview and Personal Reflections." Panelist Rafael Fernandez, the chief editor of the Cuban social science periodical *Temas*, noted that the Cuban Revolution set its foundation in its first five years when Fidel Castro mobilized the people, particularly the youth, to defend the revolution in a civil war against the counter-revolutionary forces funded and supported by the U.S. The people's victory in this civil war, Hernandez said, has been etched in the historical memory of the Cuban people and has helped them find their bearings over six challenging decades in which Cuba has gone from strength to strength. He

expressed confidence that, with all the economic, political and social challenges Cuba faces today, the people will continue to defend their revolution and decide on their future themselves.



**Panel discussion on Cuba and the Cuban Revolution, October 31, 2019, with (left to right) Rafael Hernandez, Chief Editor, *Temas*; Ambassador Josefina Vidal; William LeoGrande, American University School of Public Affairs; and Emily Morris, University College London.**

Cuba's Ambassador to Canada, H.E. Josefina Vidal was another member of this panel. She reflected on Cuba-U.S. relations and their effect on the peoples of both countries. She emphasized that despite the setbacks in relations under the Trump administration, public opinion in Cuba, the U.S. and around the world favours normalized U.S.-Cuba relations. She noted that the international solidarity and support of the Canadian people and peoples of the world has had a profound impact on the Cuban people and noted that the November 7 vote at the UN General Assembly against the U.S. blockade would undoubtedly once again show the broad support of the world's peoples for Cuba.

The first panel on the second day was entitled "Setting the Historical Scene: Evolution of the Revolution." Amongst other things, panelists discussed the challenges posed to living under the brutal U.S. sanctions and blockade. Also discussed was the revolutionary leadership of Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro and now President Miguel Díaz-Canel to mobilize the Cuban people to defend their sovereignty and independence under all conditions and circumstances by sticking to their principles. Carlos Alzugaray, former diplomat and member of the *Temas* editorial board, was asked during the question period to sum up the difference between Cuba in 1959 and Cuba today. He affirmed that since 1959 Cuba has more relations and deeper engagement with the nations and peoples of the world; that social justice has been broadened and deepened along with the democratic participation of the people, and that, in terms of the economy, Cuba still maintains its independence and is mobilizing to renovate the economy to serve the people's needs today.

The next panel, entitled "Surviving Climate Change, Envisioning the Ecological Future," discussed how Cuba is addressing climate change and some of the measures the Cuban state is taking in this regard. Highlighted by the panel was Tarea Vida, or Life Project, a 100-year plan adopted by the Cuban Council of Ministers to deal with hurricanes and other natural disasters which are on the rise in the region because of climate change. Measures under the Tarea Vida program include educating and mobilizing citizens of all ages to deal with storms and hurricanes with the view of meeting these disasters in an organized way, thus providing security for the people and protecting human life. Professor Emily Kirk of Dalhousie University noted that the measures taken by the Cuban government have reduced the loss of life and damage to property to a minimum, thanks to the foresight of the Cuban state, in contrast to the experience in other Caribbean nations and the U.S. itself. The four women panelists, three of whom work for U.S. non-governmental agencies, highlighted Cuba's stellar efforts in crisis-management, economic reform and building a sustainable ecological future for its citizens despite many challenges. One of the speakers noted that Cuba is a world leader in tackling climate change and that when considered in the context of the brutal U.S. blockade and sanctions, this is remarkable.





**Panel on Cuban and climate change, November 1, 2019, with Rebekah Stewart, Center for Responsible Travel; Julia Sagbien, Dalhousie University, Valerie Miller, Environmental Defense Fund; and Margarita Fernández Vermont Caribbean Institute.**

A third panel entitled "Social Change in Cuba: Past Successes, Future Challenges," looked at the measures and challenges over the last 60 years in ensuring the rights of the people in the context of Cuba's social and political development. The panel brought out the Cuban state's outstanding efforts to ensure the basic rights of the Cuban people in spite of, and in defiance of, the U.S. embargo, sanctions and hostility towards Cuba. Panelists noted that since 1959, the Cuban state has enacted laws to ensure that health care, housing, education, and other basic rights are guaranteed, while at the same time taking measures to end the racism and discrimination inherited from the previous society. While acknowledging that there are still many challenges, it was noted that the new Cuban constitution provides protection for the LGBTQ community and is working to harmonize the various claims of the people of minority collectives within Cuban society with those of the rest of society.

The third day began with a panel discussion on Cuba's economy, entitled "Economic Change in Cuba: Successes and Challenges." This necessarily included the current situation where the Trump administration is stepping up the illegal U.S. blockade. Most recently this is the reactivation of Title III of the unjust and brutal *Helms-Burton Act* of 1996. This legislation permits those parties whose property was nationalized by the Cuban government in 1959 (through the proper legal mechanisms) to sue for compensation in U.S. courts, those companies deemed to be "trafficking" the properties in question, including Canadian companies and individuals doing business in Cuba.

It was noted that with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries, additional pressure was exerted on the Cuban economy which triggered the "Special Period" when the government took special measures to provide for the people while safeguarding Cuba's independence and sovereignty. It was noted that the U.S.-led campaign today to destabilize the Maduro government in Venezuela has created additional burdens which the Cuban people and state are facing courageously. They are also taking ongoing measures such as expanding the private sector, mobilizing the military in production, and establishing cooperatives in agriculture to encourage foreign investment and food self-sufficiency.

One of the speakers pointed out that "You don't get Cubans to give concessions on the basis of pressure." The long historic struggle of the Cuban people for their independence and self-determination against the U.S. hegemonism has sharpened their resilience and resolve to uphold their principles and maintain their dignity as a people.

The panel also noted that the attitude of successive U.S. governments towards Cuba is counter-productive and out of step with the times. It is also out of step with the desire of the people of the

U.S. who would like to have peaceful and normal relations with the people of Cuba, who share the same sentiment.

In the panel discussion entitled "Cuba's International Relations, Now and Tomorrow," what was most striking was Cuba's profound internationalist spirit and desire for friendly relations with all nations and peoples, including the U.S. Despite having their own difficulties and challenges, the Cuban people over 60 years have always been ready to do their internationalist duty, and have been unstinting in providing assistance to those who ask for help. These unparalleled efforts include the 15-year contribution to the Angolan people to defeat the South African invaders and break the back of apartheid, and the 30,000 medical personnel now contributing their knowledge and expertise in countries around the world, including in Venezuela. It was noted that these selfless acts have contributed to isolating the U.S., while at the same time raising Cuba's prestige internationally.



**Panel on Cuba's international relations, November 2, 2019, with (left to right) Prof. Isaac Saney; Ana Covarrubias, Colegio de México; Prof. John Kirk; Mervyn Bain, University of Aberdeen; and H. Michael Erisman, Indiana State University.**

This historic conference in Halifax ended with a closing plenary "Survival, Development and Sovereignty," featuring a panel that included Ambassador Vidal. She noted that Cuba has many challenges, particularly on the economic front and among the measures it is taking to address this problem, it is placing high priority on the Cuban embassies and missions abroad to seek out new economic opportunities and partnerships. She emphasized that Cuba will not only survive, it will resist and thrive in the future. She thanked the Canadian people for their support for Cuba and noted that there has been some success in working with the Canadian government to improve relations. As an example, she noted that thanks to the many letters and phone calls from Canadians and Cubans resident in Canada, the Canadian Visa office in Havana has been partially reopened after it was closed unilaterally in May this year.

Another panelist, Hal Klepak, Professor Emeritus at the Royal Military College in Kingston, emphasized the remarkable achievements of the Cuban revolution and expressed his conviction that the Cuban people, despite having many problems over the last 60 years, will continue to be an inspiration to the peoples of the world.

*(Photos: D. Salas.)*