

**Oral and Written Statements by Maria C. Werlau**  
**Executive Director of Cuba Archive / Free Society Project, Inc.**  
**Hearing “The Communist Cuban regime’s disregard for human rights”**  
**U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations**  
**December 11, 2024 - Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C.**  
*<https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/the-communist-cuban-regimes-disregard-for-human-rights/>*

**Oral Statement**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for this opportunity and for caring.

My written statement focused on some of the Cuban regime’s worst crimes, although it violates essentially all rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The human cost of the hemisphere’s longest dictatorship ever –at least in post-colonial times– has impacted Cubans and citizens of many countries, including ours. Comparisons pale with a regime that kills even defenseless children and keeps the equivalent of the Berlin Wall at Guantánamo –almost identical and lasting twice as long– yet fails to elicit international outrage or attention. In a few minutes, it’s impossible to do any justice to so many horrors and its victims.

Today, Cuba’s totalitarian military rulers –Communist only in name and Stalinist ways– hold on to power by sheer terror. They became apartheid capitalists in post-Soviet times, enhancing their usual monarchic privileges but continuing to impose failed socialist central planning on the masses to preserve absolute control.

As a result, Cuba is a beggar country of widespread ruin in a perennial state of crisis, its people in despair. The system is ideologically, morally, politically, and economically bankrupt and its only foreseeable future is continuing decline.

The dictatorship is bent on remaining in power at all costs, yet allocates meager resources to building luxury hotels, setting the stage for a Russia-styled “transition.” It hyperfunds a huge secret police for repression and a gigantic diplomatic-intelligence--and-propaganda apparatus for international influence. It expands its revolutionary model in neighboring Venezuela, Nicaragua, and beyond, has strong alliances with our enemies (such as Iran, North Korea, Russia and China) and criminal/terrorist cartels, infiltrates governments around the world, subverts democracies, and even attacks our diplomats.

The international community offers the regime impunity, engagement, even support – appeasement at best. But the United States is exceptionally positioned to curtail its main sources of revenues:

1) its modern slavery state-run business exporting doctors, teachers, sailors, construction workers, and others as commodities; (Just the medical brigades raked in around \$31 billion in 2018-2022.)

and

2) aid from a growing U.S.-based diaspora: in remittances, merchandise, travel, telecommunications, and more, abetted by sanctions loosened by Executive order. Estimated at \$52 billion in the eleven years to 2019, it can only have grown with over 640,000 Cubans who poured through the border in 2022 to 2024 and around 100,000 granted humanitarian parole.

Enforcing the legally-mandated sanctions in the Helms Burton Law and implementing additional measures under the Trafficking in Persons Victims Act and the State Sponsor of Terrorism Designation would probably push the terminal patient to face its certain death. Cuba's rulers could be forced to negotiate the peaceful transfer of power for a transition to democracy or flee the country, counting on their large overseas assets. Otherwise, a protracted unraveling will likely lead to a worsening humanitarian crisis with a growing potential for widespread turmoil and violence.

Measures that could be implemented very quickly are:

- The travel and remittance sanctions of Helms Burton.
- To combat the trafficking: sanctioning Ministers of Health of Cuba's partners, conditioning funding to PAHO, and declaring Mexico in violation of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.
- Denying visa waivers to *all* travelers to Cuba, including Canadians.
- Forbidding most technical-scientific exchanges and funding to all Cuban state institutions.

There are many such measures, but we are out of time. At the very least, these would combat exploitation and other nefarious activities reinforcing Cuba's structural socio-economic deformities and deny resources to the military monopoly.

Anyhow, enforcement of our laws is essential to our democracy.

Thank you.

## Prepared testimony / Written statement

Since January 1st, 1959, for almost 66 years, the Cuban regime has committed egregious violations of, essentially, all human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: of the right to life, freedom of thought, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association, movement, conscience and religion, free choice of employment, just conditions of work, and due process of law, as well as the rights to periodic and genuine elections, private property, privacy, to form trade unions, and more.

Many of these violations meet the definition of “crimes against humanity,” which has yet to be codified in a dedicated treaty of international law, but is generally understood as inhuman acts directed against a civilian population deliberately committed knowingly by a government against its own subjects and characterized by their widespread or systematic nature, often involving state or organizational policy.<sup>1</sup>

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998,<sup>2</sup> which reflects the consensus among the international community, provides a list that includes the following crimes against humanity that are committed systematically by the Cuban Communist regime: murder; enslavement; deportation or forcible transfer of population; imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty; torture; persecution against identifiable groups based on political, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, or gender grounds; enforced disappearance of persons; apartheid; and other inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or mental or physical health (such as forced labor and indoctrination of minors, family separation, denial of medical care and housing, deliberate impoverishment, and others). For reasons of space, I will focus on just a few.

### I. Violations of the right to life.

Cuban victims of death and disappearance are estimated in the tens of thousands, and in the hundreds of thousands when accounting for the Cuban Communist regime’s numerous international armed interventions and brazen subversion of democracies in several continents, particularly, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cuba Archive, the non-profit organization I co-founded in 2001, is developing a comprehensive record of the cost in lives of the Cuban revolution on a case-by-case basis, which is available in real time on an online database.<sup>3</sup> Through December 7, 2024, we had documented 8,172 individual cases of death or disappearance attributed to agents of the Cuban State. We believe that the actual number is many times higher, but field work and access to official records is impossible in totalitarian Cuba and enhanced documentation efforts are not possible with our minimal resources. The undercounting is particularly extreme in several categories including extrajudicial killings, deaths in prison, the murder of civilians attempting to flee and deaths and disappearances of sea escapes, “rafters.”

The Cuban regime’s open disregard for human life continues in full display and, for over six decades has impacted not just Cubans but also citizens of many countries. 8 US citizens have been executed

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<sup>1</sup> See “Crimes against humanity,” Definitions of genocide and related crimes, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the international treaty that founded the Court and establishes its governing framework. Adopted at the Rome Conference on July 17, 1998, it entered into force on July 1, 2002, thereby creating the International Criminal Court (ICC). The United States is not a member.

<sup>3</sup> Database of Deaths and Disappearances, CubaArchive.org/database.

by firing squad, 11 otherwise killed extrajudicially, 1 forcibly disappeared, and 8 killed in terrorist attacks sponsored or supported by Cuba (including Frank Connor,<sup>4</sup> father of Joseph Connor, a witness at this hearing).

Mass firing squad executions in 1959 into the 1960s helped consolidate the Communist regime through sheer terror and effectively crushed the resistance.<sup>5</sup> Since the late 1990s, there has been an unofficial moratorium on applying capital punishment, but the Penal Code establishes the death penalty delivered by firing squad for many causes including a very expansive definition of acts against “the security, independence, or integrity of the state” and the socialist order.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is that the Cuban regime has found and continues to find many ways to kill. To date, Cuba Archive has documented 1,324 extrajudicial killings (actual or suspected) by the Castro regime. Just this past November 30<sup>th</sup>, 30-year old political prisoner Manuel Guillén was beaten to death at the Combinado del Este prison of Havana, which was reported, as usual, as a suicide by hanging. His body showed clear signs of a brutal beating. Guillén was serving six years in prison for having filmed and distributed videos of nationwide mass demonstrations of July 11, 2021 and had refused to work for State Security within the prison.<sup>7</sup>

171 extrajudicial killings have ensued in exit attempts from the national territory. In Cuba, it is a crime to leave without prior government authorization and Article 59 of the Penal Code punishes attempts to do so with years of prison, in clear violation of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>8</sup> It is also punished with death. Since the start of the Communist regime, Cuban authorities have historically shot at or sunk vessels (by ramming or throwing sandbags from small aircraft), and used other means of violence to prevent citizens from “escaping.” These acts have been perpetrated on defenseless individuals of all ages, including dozens of minors. Several massacres are well documented; the latest occurred in October 2022 on the northern coast of Cuba’s Pinar del Rio province, when Cuba’s Border Guard rammed a vessel carrying 23 people and killed eight persons, including the 2-year old child Elizabeth Meizoso.<sup>9</sup>

At least 30 Cuban citizens have been put to death by firing squad, sentenced for attempting to leave the country “illegally,” including<sup>10</sup> in 1963, three Protestant ministers forcibly repatriated after fleeing by boat to Anguilla Key, Bahamas, in 1981, three brothers, ages 19 to 25, captured in a Special troops

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<sup>4</sup> “Frank Thomas Connor,” <https://cubaarchive.org/database/?caseid=1324> . Also see “US citizens killed or disappeared by Cuba’s communist regime, 1959 to date,” May 1, 2022, Work- in-progress, Cuba Archive, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/US-citizens-updated-5.1.2022-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Cuba Archive has documented 3,083 firing squad executions, of which 2,737 occurred in 1959-1969, the first ten years of the revolution. (Database of Deaths and Disappearances, CubaArchive.org/database.)

<sup>6</sup> Ley 151/2022 “Código Penal” (GOC-2022-861-O93), Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, Gaceta Oficial No. 93 Ordinaria de 1ro de septiembre de 2022, Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba, Ministerio de Justicia.

<sup>7</sup> “Manuel Jesús Guillén Esplugas,” <https://cubaarchive.org/database/?caseid=11756>

<sup>8</sup> This violates Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”

<sup>9</sup> “Elizabeth Meizoso,” <https://cubaarchive.org/database/?caseid=11477>; “Nos partieron la lancha al medio: Hablan desde Cuba sobrevivientes del hundimiento de lancha en Bahía Honda,” *America TeVé*, Oct. 31, 2022. “Eso no fue accidente, fue asesinato,” *14yMedio*, Nov. 1, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> See individual case records at CubaArchive.org/database and “Extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances of civilians attempting to flee Cuba,” Cuba Archive, Nov. 21, 2022, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Killings-and-forced-disappearances-in-exit-attempts.pdf>.

raid of the Vatican Embassy in Havana, where they had sought asylum,<sup>11</sup> and in 2003, three young men who attempted to hijack a passenger ferry to escape Cuba.

Cuba also has a nearly identical version of the Berlin Wall lasting more than twice as long,<sup>12</sup> that prevents citizens from reaching the US naval base in Guantánamo. Barbed wire, high fences, mine fields, watch towers, dogs, and armed sharpshooters with orders to fire were complemented in the 1990s with a sea wall at Guantánamo Bay. The sea and land walls account for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of victims who've lost their lives or limbs, eyesight, or paid with years of prison.<sup>13</sup> This intentional and systematic killing of unarmed citizens attempting to escape their country arguably fits the definition of the crime of genocide.

At least 13 political opponents have died since 2011 in circumstances suspected as deliberate killings, including two main opposition leaders: Laura Pollán,<sup>14</sup> of the Ladies in White, in 2011 and Oswaldo Payá,<sup>15</sup> of the Christian Liberation Movement, in 2012.

## II. Forced labor / trafficking in persons of exported temporary workers, mostly in medical missions.<sup>16</sup>

My personal involvement in this issue is extensive and includes long interviews with many doctors and other workers who have served in Cuba's international missions. In 2009, I began to earnestly investigate and denounce this as a unique form of modern slavery in violation of numerous international standards and agreements, including the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (2003).<sup>17</sup> In 2010, I published the first of several academic papers that have followed, presented at a conference in July 2010,<sup>18</sup> and an Opinion Editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, I testified for this Committee

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<sup>11</sup> CubaArchive.org/database (all records have the sources of the information). Also see "Submission for the Universal Periodic Review of Cuba of May 2018," NGO Submission for the United Nations Human Rights Council, Oct. 5, 2017, prepared by Cuba Archive / Free Society Project and co-submitted with Cubalex and The Human Rights Foundation Center for Law and Democracy, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Right-to-Life-UNHRC-UPR.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> The Berlin Wall existed from August 1961 to November 1989. Over 100,000 citizens of the German Democratic Republic, GDR (Communist Germany) tried to escape across the inner-German border or the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1988. More than 600 were shot and killed by GDR border guards or otherwise died during their escape attempt. At the Berlin Wall alone, at least 100 were shot and killed, accidentally killed, or killed themselves when they were caught. ("Victims of the Wall," [https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/history/victims-of-the-wall/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/history/victims-of-the-wall/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

<sup>13</sup> "Cuba's Berlin Wall still stands: killings and disappearances of persons fleeing towards the US base at Guantánamo," Cuba Archive, Nov. 10, 2014, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Cubas-Berlin-Wall-Still-Stands-11.10.2014.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> "Laura Pollán Toledo," <https://cubaarchive.org/database/?caseid=207>.

<sup>15</sup> "Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas," <https://cubaarchive.org/database/?caseid=430>.

<sup>16</sup> This section primarily takes, at times literally, from a report written by the author from extensive investigations since 2009: "Overview of trafficking in persons in Cuba's medical brigades," Free Society Project /Cuba Archive, Nov. 15, 2023, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Overview-of-TIP-in-Cubas-Medical-Brigades-11.2023.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> The Trafficking in Persons Protocol is a supplement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>

<sup>18</sup> Maria C. Werlau, "Cuba-Venezuela's health diplomacy: the politics of humanitarianism," *Cuba in Transition*: Vol. 20, Nov. 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Maria C. Werlau, "Cuba's cash-for-doctors program," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 16, 2010.

on the trafficking.<sup>20</sup> Over the years, the international community has fortunately become increasingly aware that this is an outrageous practice similar to slavery, which is universally accepted as a “crime against humanity” when committed by public officials against any person.

The fact is that the Cuban government runs a global business that exports Cuban workers as “commodities” and generates the largest official source of revenues of the Cuban State. Doctors, nurses, medical technicians, teachers, sports trainers, musicians, entertainers, sailors, I.T. specialists, military experts, repressors, scientists, agronomists, architects, construction workers, geologists, tobacco rollers, and others from myriad fields are sent on “internationalist missions” of 2 to 3 years. They can be called into duty at very short notice, sent wherever they are ordered, and are systematically exploited overseas in partnership with governments, international organizations, and private entities that sign “confidential” (secret) agreements with Cuba’s Ministry of Health or specialized State agencies such as *Comercializadora de Servicios* or *Antex* (the later only for Angola). Cuba typically receives payment from host governments entering into bilateral agreements with entities of the Cuban State; in certain cases, international agencies or third countries pay the bill. Cuba retains between 97% to 80% of the wages paid for or to the workers.

Aside from the labor exploitation, the workers are subject to many other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments, such as long enforced family separation, the prohibition from entering Cuba for at least eight years, and the confiscation of wages held in savings if “deserting” a mission.<sup>21</sup>

As of September 2021, Cuba had 327 state enterprises exporting services;<sup>22</sup> details are lacking, given the usual lack of transparency regarding Cuban entities, but the so-called “medical internationalism” reportedly generates from 55-75% of the revenues. In May 2023, Cuba was reporting around 22,000 medical workers serving in 58 to 59 countries and over 605,698 workers having served until that date across five continents.<sup>23</sup>

Cuba also uses these “brigades” to advance its geostrategic, political, and economic goals, and derives capital that translates into myriad benefits: strengthened ties with host nations, international support in international organizations --including votes--, assistance, loans, investments, access to needed imports and markets for Cuba’s exports and opportunities to spy and recruit agents for Cuba’s intelligence services. The workers sent overseas in any capacity may be officials of Cuban intelligence or recruited as clandestine agents, but even those who are not must do the bidding of Cuban intelligence (such as serving as informants and/or agents of influence) or face reprisals.

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<sup>20</sup> Maria C. Werlau, Testimony to the US Congress, Washington, D.C., Mar. 22, 2016. US House of Representatives’ Hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Get it right this time: a victims-centered trafficking in persons report.”

<sup>21</sup> An undetermined number, allegedly up to 20%, of the Cuban doctors reportedly decided to remain in Brazil when Cuba removed the entire mission in November 2018. (For more information on Cuba’s temporary workers’ program, see <https://nosomosdesertores.com> and “Fact Sheet: Cuba’s export workers,” op. cit.)

<sup>22</sup> “MINCEX: Cuba tiene muchas potencialidades para incrementar exportaciones,” *Cuba Debate*, Oct. 12, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, X, May 23, 2023, <https://x.com/DiazCanelB/status/1660991669112537090>; “Cuba denuncia que EE. UU. lanza convocatoria con fondos millonarios para fomentar campaña contra colaboración médica,” *Granma*, Jul. 22, 2023; <https://www.granma.cu/cuba/2023-07-22/cuba-denuncia-que-ee-uu-lanza-convocatoria-con-fondos-millonarios-para-fomentar-campana-contr-colaboracion-medica> (Actual numbers are impossible to verify and are reported inconsistently by Cuban officials and official agencies.)

These labor arrangements date back to the early 1960s, when Cuba started to export workers to help allies. Over time, the scheme in the medical and educational fields attained the acquiescence, support, and even the participation of many democratic governments and international agencies such as the *World Health Organization* and the *Pan American Health Organization*. A huge number of Cuban collaborators were sent to Chavez's Venezuela starting in 2003 and by 2005, export services net of tourism had become Cuba's primary source of revenues. In 2018-2022 Cuba reported \$31 billion in revenues from "health and social service" exports, which generated \$4.9 billion in 2022,<sup>24</sup> the last year for which official data is available. These revenues are not used to help the people of Cuba. According to Cuba's Office of National Statistics, in 2018 to 2022 just 0.6% to 2% of the reported export services were invested in social services including health.

**Cuba: Health service exports & Investments in social services incl. health**  
US\$ millions

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Exports of health and social services	\$6,398.5	\$5,382.2	\$3,997.9	\$4,349.9	\$4,882.2
Investment in social services incl. health	\$51.5	\$27.7	\$40.4	\$557.4	\$789.3
% of invest. in social services incl. health	1%	0.60%	1%	2%	2%

Source: *Statistical Yearbooks, Cuba's National Office of Statistics and Information.*

The Cuban regime and its international networks --agents of influence, allies, and friends-- glorify the practice<sup>25</sup> as "solidarity" and "humanitarianism," and promote its global expansion through intense diplomatic, intelligence, and propaganda efforts.

### III. Many other egregious violations

The totalitarian Cuban regime has brought upon millions of its citizens exile, family separation, forced expatriation, indoctrination, untold miseries and despair, denied their right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services (as called for in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). The system guarantees exclusive privileges for the ruling elite and imposes socialist central planning for the masses; it very quickly destroyed a thriving economy and middle class and has turned Cuba into a parasitic state that currently receives aid from even tiny St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As of October 2024, Cuba held at least 1,117 political prisoners in terrible conditions, including subjected to forced labor at work camps. Over 550 are still incarcerated for their involvement in the July 11, 2021 islandwide mass peaceful protests.<sup>26</sup>

Since 1986 Cuba's external debt is in moratorium; it has defaulted time and again on restructuring agreements despite massive debt forgiveness. Today, the country is a land of widespread misery and despair, its infrastructure wrecked, with downward spiraling agricultural and industrial production, a and a huge deficit in housing while buildings and houses crumble to the ground on top of its inhabitants. Migration crisis, fertility crisis, sanitary crisis, demographic crisis, an elevated number of suicides... It presents a desolate panorama whose only foreseeable future is continuing decline.

<sup>24</sup> Anuario Estadístico de Cuba, Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, República de Cuba, onei.gob.cu.

<sup>25</sup> See one well-funded US-based effort at <http://medicc.org/ns/> and one of several books with this approach: John M. Kirk & H. Michael Erisman, *Cuban medical internationalism: origins, evolution, and goals* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> "The Cuban regime keeps more than 550 demonstrators from July 11th imprisoned," CiberCuba, Nov. 28. 2024.

The rulers, now open capitalists of an enclave and apartheid system, loosen and reimpose restrictions at will, a back-and-forth considered by some as a “reform process.” There are no judicial guarantees for entrepreneurs or investors, national or foreign. In fact, many citizens of Canada, Britain, Spain, Chile, and other countries have been imprisoned for years under fabricated charges without due process of law.

Despite its failed economy, Cuba has consistently acted against the U.S. and regional and global security.<sup>27</sup> It has apparently allowed or directly participated in attacking US and Canadian diplomats with undetermined sonic devices. It has subverted democracies and directly intervened in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia to impose its authoritarian model. It is like a cancer that has spread its insidious ways, with a revolutionary plan for regional expansion nowadays called “the Bolivarian Alliance.” It has solidified political, military and strategic alliances with Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Belarus, Vietnam, and the likes, to challenge and defeat the United States. It continues supporting and harboring terrorists and criminals from the US, Spain, Colombia, and many other countries. It has long participated in drug trafficking and many other illegal international activities.

As the citizens, forced into poverty, lack even basic food, medicines, and essential services, the regime devotes massive resources to build luxury hotels,<sup>28</sup> planning for a Russia-type transition, and funds a huge secret police for internal repression and a gigantic diplomatic-intelligence-propaganda apparatus for international influence. No other country of similar economic standing or size comes close to this investment, in fact, a select number of larger and richer countries do.

Cuba’s has an unusually large network of 126 embassies, 20 consulates, and 20 representations, including a mission to the United Nations in New York of 45 diplomats, entirely disproportionate to its economy and size. Most, if not all, of its embassies have embedded intelligence centers dedicated to recruiting agents and managing a global army of spies, collaborators, and propagandists: journalists, government officials, artists, scientists, academics, etc. recruited to advance Cuba’s goals. The Directorate of Intelligence’s prime objective is to advance Cuba’s interests by countering the United States. Cuba is estimated to have at least 5,000 intelligence relations in the US<sup>29</sup> and over 1,600 in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>30</sup>

Fidel Castro considered propaganda “the main food of the revolution”<sup>31</sup> and, from the beginning of the revolutionary regime, prioritized building a synchronized propaganda apparatus under the ideological department of the Cuban Communist Party. Prensa Latina, one of two news agencies, has a staff of around 500 and 1,000 freelancers in 400 offices internationally, and operates in six languages

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<sup>27</sup> The author has written and presented extensively on this issue. Here publications on this topic include Maria C. Werlau, *Cuba’s intervention in Venezuela: a strategic occupation with global implications*, *Free Society Project*, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> 12.6 - Volumen de inversiones por clase de actividad económica, Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, República de Cuba, [onei.gob.cu](http://onei.gob.cu).

<sup>29</sup> “Estimated number of Cuba’s intelligence relationships dedicated to working against the United States,” Cuba Archive, Dec. 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Intelligence-relations-in-US-12.2021-update.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> “Relaciones de inteligencia de Cuba en Latinoamerica y el Caribe,” Cuba Archive, Dec. 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Relaciones-de-Inteligencia-Latinoam..pdf>

<sup>31</sup> “Un grave alerta de Guaicaipuro Lameda,” *Las Armas de Coronel*, Mar. 11, 2016, <https://lasarmasdecoronel.blogspot.com/2016/03/un-grave-alerta-de-guaicaipuro-lameda.html>

in multiple print, television, radio, and digital sites.<sup>32</sup> Cuba also funds a vast and unique international solidarity network built over decades that, according to its reports, has 1,649 friendship associations in 150 countries, 73 alumni associations in 62 countries, and relationships with 60 peace organizations in 57 countries. In 2023, it created 109 “Parliamentary Friendship Groups” to influence foreign policy within parliaments worldwide: 34 in Europe, 21 in the Americas/Caribbean, 28 in Africa & Middle East, and 26 in Asia.<sup>33</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that Cuba’s Communist dictatorship enjoys impunity and even worldwide support despite its egregious human rights violations and threats to global peace and security. With its parasitic socialist economy in perennial crisis, it receives extensive unconditional aid from governments and international organizations.

### US policy recommendations: a path forward

The Cuban regime expends massive global efforts to blame the US embargo for everything that goes wrong in Cuba. Some just argue that because “economic sanctions on Cuba have not worked,” they should be eliminated, or, they disregard the abhorrent crimes of the Cuban regime and ignore its victims by blaming US sanctions. Since 1992, Cuba has presented an annual resolution to the UN General Assembly on the “**necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.**” It’s a cheap shot against the US that receives overwhelming global support —it is inconsequential to everyone but the disregarded Cuban people. This and other such pronouncements are silent on what the international community is willing to do regarding its “responsibility to protect” the oppressed people of Cuba. The US remains the only country willing to pressure for change in Cuba with something more than empty words. In fact, even empty words are lacking. I cannot recall any General Assembly resolution on any of the egregious human rights violations or violent international interventions by the Cuban regime.

Since 2005, the UN enshrined its responsibility to protect “should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.” UN members may intervene by peaceful means such as diplomacy, mediation, or sanctions and, as a last resort, through collective action through the UN Security Council, including the use of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, the UN rewards the Cuban regime for its misdeeds. Cuba has recently been on the Executive Boards of the Pan-American Health Organization (for 2020-2023) and World Food Program (for 2020-2022). Since the crackdown following island-wide mass protests of July 2021, it has been elected to many UN bodies, including in 2023 to a second 3-year term at the Human Rights Council with 76% of the possible votes of the General Assembly (146 of 192)<sup>35</sup> —making the Cuban dictatorship

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Werlau, *Cuba’s intervention in Venezuela*, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Nuria Barbosa León, “Cuba, un faro de solidaridad,” *Granma*, Dec. 27, 2022, <https://www.granma.cu/mundo/2022-12-27/cuba-un-faro-de-solidaridad-27-12-2022-19-12-34>

<sup>34</sup> About the responsibility to protect, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/responsibility-protect/about>; Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005, 60/1, 2005 World Summit Outcome, United Nations, [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_60\\_1.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_60_1.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> “UN General Assembly elects 15 new members to Human Rights Council,” *UN News*, Oct. 10, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142112>

responsible for “the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe.” Since 2021, Cuba has been elected, among others, to the Executive Board of UNESCO (2023-2027),<sup>36</sup> the Governing Body of the International Labor Organization (2021-2026),<sup>37</sup> and to multiple bodies of the UN Economic and Social Council, including the Executive Board of UNICEF (2023-2025), the Commission on the Legal and Social Status of Women (2023-2027), the Social Development Commission (2025-2029), and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Commission (2025-2027).<sup>38</sup>

Many have called—and some continue to call—for engagement and appeasement of Cuba’s rulers. If anything has not worked it is that. A constantly revolving door of presidents, former presidents, kings and kings-to-be, parliamentarians, ministers, business leaders, scientists, and heads of international organizations from all over the world have paid court to the criminal Cuban dictatorship with official visits, “dialogue,” unilateral concessions, massive debt forgiveness, continuing financial and material aid, free transfer of scientific and technical support, red carpet treatment at major capitals by the leaders of the world’s strongest democracies, and even awards and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet, since the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, which led to Cuba’s opening to foreign investment and a tourist industry for capitalist visitors, at least 401 Cubans have been killed extrajudicially,<sup>39</sup> many thousands imprisoned, and millions pushed into exile and growing poverty.

What would likely work is the full enforcement of existing US laws that call for isolation and pressure on the Cuban regime, for it to stop oppressing its people and threatening our national security. Many US laws have been eroded by executive mandate or not amply implemented. The list includes the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (“Helms Burton law”) and additional measures under the Trafficking in Persons Victims Act (TVPA), the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.

First, sanctions are the right thing to do; second, they are the usual second line of defense short of an armed intervention; and third, enforcement could be the final blow to a regime enslaving its people that is a security menace to our country, the region, and the world. Multilateral sanctions would be best, and this great democracy should push to elicit them, but the US alone is exceptionally posed to greatly disrupt Cuba’s two primary sources of revenues: 1.) export service revenues from state-run trafficking/forced labor, which totaled \$4.9 billion in 2022, and 2.) aid from a growing U.S.-based diaspora (remittances, merchandise, travel, telecommunications, and more), estimated at countless billions a year.

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<sup>36</sup> “Díaz-Canel hails Cuba’s election to UNESCO Executive Board,” *Cubanew/CAN*, Nov. 16, 2023, <http://www.cubanews.acn.cu/cuba/22967-diaz-canel-hails-cuba-s-election-to-unesco-executive-board>

<sup>37</sup> “Cuba elected as deputy member of the ILO Governing Body,” Cuba Minrex, Geneva, 14 June 14, 2021, <https://misiones.cubaminrex.cu/en/articulo/cuba-elected-deputy-member-ilo-governing-body>; Cuba re-elected deputy member of the ILO Governing Body, Havana, Prensa Latina, Jun. 7, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> “Cuba elected to four United Nations bodies,” op. cit; “Cuba elected to subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council,” New York, Cuba Minrex (Ministry of Foreign Relations), Apr. 9, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> CubaArchive.org/database.