

A Pan African Dialogue on Cuba



From Black Bird Press News

As we see with the Oliver Stone movie *South of the Border*, the winds of radical change are blowing throughout the Americas, so as North American Africans we are obligated to be informed on the rapidly developing events in the Americas, not only in the USA, though a little wind of change is blowing here with the election of the first North American African descendant of slavery and colonialism. In Bolivia the first indigenous man was elected president since 500 years ago. So there is a paradigm shift happening requiring us to think out of the box of Pax Americana. In short, we must radicalize and revolutionize our thinking, planning and actions, simply to be in harmony with our brothers and sisters throughout the Americas who are dumping Yankee imperialism and white supremacy domination and ownership of their people's labor and natural resources. We must do the same here in the belly of the beast. In this spirit, we present the following dialogue on Cuba that took place some months ago among the intellectuals.

--Marvin X

Hip Hop Artist Dead Prez on Sanctions



Internationally acclaimed hip hop group Dead Prez recently announced plans to make a song that would call for the lifting of the US-EU sanctions against Zimbabwe, as well as the US blockade on Cuba. En route to Washington DC, one of the group's lyricists, brother Mutulu Olugbala whose stage name is M-1 gave *The Herald's* US correspondent, Obi Egbuna (OE.; obiegbuna15@yahoo.com) an exclusive interview and shared the reasons behind the decision for a song focusing on both Zimbabwe and Cuba.

OE: Brother Mutulu, thank you for granting *The Herald* this interview. Could we begin by having you share the reason for doing a song concerning US-EU sanctions on Zimbabwe and the US blockade on Cuba?

M-1: In the case of Zimbabwe, the US-EU sanctions are approaching 10 years very rapidly, and the monstrous US blockade on Cuba, is approaching 50 years old.

This tactic being used by our former colonial and slave masters to politically isolate countries and stifle their economic growth and ability to strengthen basic infrastructure is as destructive as war, military invasions (and) natural calamities like hurricanes and tornadoes. But (it) hasn't received the same attention.

We feel the US Government is extremely hypocritical when it labels both Zimbabwe and Cuba dictatorships, boldly claiming both countries deprive its people basic democratic freedoms.

However, the international community vehemently opposes US-EU sanctions on Zimbabwe and the US blockade on Cuba and the White House, US Senate and Congress won't budge at all.

I sincerely hope this song will not only bring more awareness to the suffering these policies have caused in Zimbabwe and Cuba, but also celebrate the resilience of the leadership and people on the ground in these countries, who overcome daily challenges therefore standing firm in the face of adversity.

OE: Brother Mutulu, the timing of the decision to do this song will be received very well in Zimbabwe and Cuba.

In Zimbabwe Akon, Sizzla Kalonji and Maxi Priest have all performed there recently, and in Cuba earlier this year Kool and the Gang performed and received an award. Will Dead Prez do this song alone or reach out to other artistes to have more impact?

M-1: We will definitely reach out to the artistes you mentioned who performed in Zimbabwe and the artistes who we know have performed in Cuba. We also want to involve artistes in both Zimbabwe and Cuba because in the final analysis who else can speak better for their leaders and people?

I was amazed when I was told that Zimbabweans affectionately refer to their country as the land of musicians, and we know in the case of Cuba, it would be hard to find a country that has used art in a revolutionary framework better than they have.

I am getting excited just thinking of the potential of this song. It will cross genres and generations, and complement the genuine efforts of countless freedom fighters who dedicated their lives to building bridges between people driven by an unyielding passion for freedom and justice.

OE: Brother Mutulu, what in your opinion are the broader implications of having the first US president of African descent extending sanctions on Zimbabwe two years in a row, and approaching lifting of the US blockade on Cuba on the Democratic Party's timetable, instead of the ties of the world community?

M-1: First and foremost, it is important for President Obama to look at Zimbabwe and Cuba as a US Democrat and not an African; therefore he is mainly preoccupied with US interests in both nations, not what is in the best interest of the masses.

If he is not challenged he will maintain the course of his predecessors. Frederick Douglas taught us, "Power concedes nothing without demand", therefore we must intensify the battle to lift US-EU sanctions on Zimbabwe and the US blockade on Cuba in the streets of the United States.

In our case as artistes, until we match the pressure of the international community in relationship to US policy on Zimbabwe and Cuba, the US government will go on with business as usual.

If we don't aggressively confront President Obama about lifting US-EU sanctions on Zimbabwe and the US blockade on Cuba, we give the impression his failure to do so has our political blessing.

OE: Brother Mutulu, inside the United States we saw the leader of the National Action Network, Reverend Al Sharpton recently organise a march in commemoration of the historic March on Washington in 1963 where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr made the "I have a dream" speech.

Because Zimbabwe and Cuba were both liberated through armed struggles, do you think that's what makes Africans born and raised in the US who consider non-violence as a cardinal principle reluctant to embrace these nations?

M-1: This is a rational explanation but nevertheless is not acceptable. The most moderate and conservative elements in our community all celebrate the Civil War as the driving force in relationship to abolishing slavery, but ignore 200 slave revolts in response to forced free labour, rape and torture.

These same groups amongst our people have also written the Deacons for Defense out of the history of the civil rights movement. You have touched on overcoming the colonial and slave mentality, therefore embracing all genuine forms of resistance, because you celebrate true progress regardless of the political manner in which it was brought about.

Zimbabwe defeated the second most powerful European army on the African continent, and Cuba launched a guerrilla war from the Sierra Maestra Mountains. This meant both countries overcame almost insurmountable odds to attain independence. Both stories bring tears to my eyes, and must be taught to our children without apology or hesitation.

OE: Brother Mutulu, what would you say to this generation of Zimbabweans and Cubans who might not appreciate Dead Prez wanting to stand with them, and would like the opportunity to relocate to the US?

M-1: The inability of the formerly enslaved and colonised to fully contextualise their political significance and succumb to pressure is part and parcel of the struggle to defend your sovereignty.

Our artistic mission is to capture for the African world, the true plight of the African in the United States, which defiantly contradicts the colonialist and imperialist version of our story.

This will make not only this generation of Zimbabweans and Cubans, but all young people not yet in touch with their fighting spirit realize that the battlefield for oppressed people is truly heaven on earth.

OE: Thanks for your thoughts and time!

M-1: Long live the heroic people and leadership of Zimbabwe and Cuba!

Afro-Cubans Push Back

by Carlos Moore

Dear brother Marvin:

I applaud your decision to initiate a sober, objective and dispassionate discussion regarding the plight of the black majority in Cuba. For decades, as you know, I have dedicated myself to bringing awareness on this serious issue to black progressives all over the world. Now, at last, a section of the Black Left has begun to take a much more critical view of events in Cuba, and that can only help to consolidate a real pan-african vision that includes us all. Again, dear brother, thank you for being an objective voice appealing to reason rather than passion, facts rather than ideological credo. Warm fraternal regards to you and all of the brothers and sisters who are helping you in that noble endeavor.

Carlos MOORE
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Prominent Black Americans Condemn Cuba on Racism

A group of prominent black Americans has for the first time publicly condemned Cuba's rights record, demanding Havana stop its "callous disregard" for black Cubans and declaring that "racism in Cuba . . . must be confronted."

"We know first-hand the experiences and consequences of denying civil freedoms on the basis of race," the group said in a statement Monday. "For that reason, we are even more obligated to voice our opinion on what is happening to our Cuban brethren."

Among the 60 signers were Princeton professor Cornel West, actress Ruby Dee Davis, film director Melvin Van Peebles, former South Florida congresswoman Carrie Meek and Dr. Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of President Barack Obama's church in Chicago.

African-American group challenges Cuba on race

Why the delayed outcry?

"All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."
Edmund Burke

A group of 60 African-American leaders, influenced by Brazil's Abdias Nascimento, a self-proclaimed admirer of Fidel Castro, condemned racism in Cuba. Congratulations.

Claim of Cuban Racism Rejected

Pro-government Cuban writers and artists Friday rejected allegations by African-Americans of racism and repression on the island, calling the charges "delusional" and part of "an anti-Cuban campaign."

The reply came as four Afro-Cuban dissidents thanked the Americans for their support, and four prominent academics from the English-speaking Caribbean condemned Cuba's "continued racial prejudice."

The allegations issued Monday by 60 African-Americans touched a raw nerve because it was the first time that U.S. blacks, historically supportive of the Castro government, criticized the island's civil rights record and supported Afro-Cuban dissidents.

In a landmark "Statement of Conscience by African Americans," 60 prominent black American scholars, artists and professionals have condemned the Cuban regime's apparent crackdown on the country's budding civil-rights movement.

"Racism in Cuba, and anywhere else in the world, is unacceptable and must be confronted," said the document, which also called for the immediate release of Dr. Darsi Ferrer, a black civil-rights leader imprisoned in July.

The U.S. State Department estimates Afro-Cubans make up 62 percent of the Cuban population, with many informed observers saying the figure is closer to 70 percent. Traditionally, African Americans have sided with the Castro regime and unilaterally condemned the United States, which, in the past, explicitly sought to topple the Cuban government. But this public rebuke of Castro's racial policies may well indicate a tide change and a more-balanced attitude.

Representing a wide spectrum of political opinion, the document was signed by Cornel West, Princeton University scholar; Ruby Dee, famed actress; Susan Taylor, former Essence magazine editor and current president of the National CARES Mentoring Movement; Julianne Malveaux, Bennett College president; Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, UCLA vice chancellor; the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, pastor emeritus of Chicago's Trinity Church; retired U.S. Rep. Carrie Meek; Kathleen Cleaver, former Black Panther activist; Ron Walters, former presidential campaign manager for Jesse Jackson and current director of the African American Leadership Institute; movie director Melvin Van Peebles; and Betty Ferguson, former Miami-Dade County commissioner.

Deepening Inequalities

What could have caused that reversal? Changing demographics in America and the election of a black U.S. president seem to have spurred African-American curiosity about the fate of Afro-Latins south of the border. Through that process, many U.S. blacks have realized that Castro, once admired for thumbing his nose at America, is now an 82-year-old dictator struggling to prolong five decades of absolute power through terror and policies that deepen racial inequalities in Cuba.

Victoria Ruiz, U.S. representative of the islandwide civil-rights group, Citizens Committee for Racial Integration, says Cuba's black movement -- vigorously suppressed in the 1960s, at the early stage of the revolution -- was resurrected in the 1990s. She complains that young, black Cubans suffer aggressive racial profiling by police. She claims that about 70 percent of Afro-Cubans are believed to be unemployed, a staggering figure by any standard. And 85 percent of Cuba's jail population is estimated to be black, Ruiz reports.

Representing 25-odd different groups, black dissidents in Cuba argue that racial disparities on the island are worsened by the Obama administration's recent decision to allow Cuban Americans to freely send remittances (worth an estimated \$1.5 billion yearly) to their relatives. More than 85 percent of Cuban Americans are white, they say, so the beneficiaries in Cuba of the new remittances policy will also be white. "These remittances could morph into start-up investment capital for its recipients, thus creating a de facto new race-class inside of Cuba," says Enrique Patterson, U.S. spokesman for the Progressive Circle Party, a major multiracial, black-led dissident group.

Clearly, Cuba's black-led, multiracial opposition movement is an open embarrassment to the Castro regime. But it is also a disquieting development for the traditionally right-wing, anti-Castro organizations around the world that have long claimed to be the heralds of the battle for "freedom and democracy" in Cuba. Taken by surprise by this new and apparently growing opposition force in the island, many white exiles are exhibiting confusion and frustration. When not openly hostile, the right-wing representatives of the predominantly white Cuban-American exile community seem unsure how to respond.

Cuba's new opposition has made no moves to elicit their support either, said Ruiz, whose Citizens Committee for Racial Integration, a multiracial organization, is led by the moderate black intellectual Juan Madrazo Luna. The Progressive Circle Party, another large dissident movement led by Afro-Cuban academic Manuel Cuesta Morúa, a self-identified Social Democrat, has shown no inclinations it desires such support either.

Patterson believes that it may very well be the absence of right-wing exile support for these social-democratic oriented and multiracial movements that now spurs African Americans to rush to their defense. "Therefore, the time has come for Washington to directly engage the island's majority about matters that will affect bilateral relations in the future," he said.

Carlos Moore, ethnologist and political scientist, is author of *Pichón: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba*.



Human Rights in Cuba: A Missed Shot on the Wrong Flank

by Pedro de la Hoz

The December 1 edition of Miami's *El Nuevo Herald* published a full report on an "African-American Statement in Support of Civil Rights in Cuba," which accuses our country of currently being a racist society, drawing on an alleged increase in civil and human rights abuses of Cuban activists with the courage to raise their voices against the island's racist system. It stated that "those isolated and courageous defenders of civil rights have been subjected to unprovoked violence, intimidation on the part of the authorities and imprisonment."

The documents had been hastily circulated a few hours before to procure signatures that would give visibility to something cooked up by Carlos Moore, an individual of Cuban origin who, for years now, has presented himself as a "specialist on racial issues" and has made a living in the United States and Brazil at the cost of manipulating Cuban realities. Prior to its publication, Moore had managed to con a respectable activist from the African-Brazilian movement, making him believe that legal action taken by the Cuban authorities against one of the beneficiaries of funds from the anti-Cuba policies of various U.S. administrations, was because the subject is black. He kidded other people who received the statement into believing the same story. Someone of the prestige of the African-American poet and playwright Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) commented on the communiqué as follows: "Moore has been promoting this type of vicious provocations since the 60s... Apparently certain African Americans who signed his petition are unaware of Moore's historical pull."

James Early, another outstanding figure who has traveled to Cuba on many occasions and who works in the Smithsonian Institute, stated that he did not trust Moore's motives for involving himself in the issue of race in Cuba and stressed that "the letter is not in line with what I and other African-American activists found in our recent visit from September 14 to 22, during which we had frank and open conversations with Cuban citizens and government officials."

Early also noted that "Cuban citizens and their political representatives are discussing how to improve their socialist revolution." So eloquent is the letter in the method it uses to distort racial issues, that one of its signatories addressed the media on Monday, December 7. Makani Themba-Nixon, director of the Praxis Project, asked for his name to be withdrawn from the documents, on the grounds that the accusatory letter against Cuba "is being manipulated to help to detract legitimacy from the important social project that is underway in that nation." A group of Cuban intellectuals, solely directed by our consciences and in a personal capacity, came together to share our point of view on the issue with African-American colleagues. Because this is about airing, in all seriousness and with arguments, human rights in our country, and about making it known that the statement issued in the United States is a missed shot on the wrong flank.

Translated by *Granma International*

North American African Activists, Intellectuals and Artists Speak

To U.S. Citizens: We Stand With Cuba

Re: Continued Solidarity With The Cuban Revolution

[Http://www.Petitiononline.Com/Withcuba/Petition.Html](http://www.petitiononline.com/withcuba/petition.html)

For Endorsement And Inquiries Just E-Mail: Blackeducator@Africamail.Com

We, the undersigned, express our continuing solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. Cuban expatriate Carlos Moore and the other signers of the December 1, 2009 ACTING ON OUR CONSCIENCE: DECLARATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN CUBA do not speak for or represent the vast majority of Black radicals/progressives, nor the sentiment of the masses of African Americans in the United States.

This December 1st Declaration ironically makes no mention of the 50 year US blockade against Cuba, and how it seeks to derail the progress made by Cuba thus far toward eradicating the racism created by its former colonizers - Spain and the United States. We are disappointed that the signers of the Declaration, many whom have made important contributions to the African American struggles against racism and for democracy, connected their charge of racism to the claims of Dr. Darsi Ferrer Ramirez and Carlos Moore, two known opponents of Cuba's revolutionary system.

Apparently, like many opportunists both Carlos Moore and Dr. Darsi Ferrer Ramirez, who resides in Cuba, saw the opportunity to solicit support for their position from this select group of high profile and "credible" sectors of the African American community. This action is divisive and misguided. We, the undersigned, believe that the Carlos Moore originated petition is designed to create a wedge in the African American support base for Cuba.

Moore's petition is also an attempt to dismiss Cuba as a modern example of how socialism is a practical system that ensures an equitable distribution of its resources for ALL Cubans. For more than forty years, Carlos Moore has opportunistically roamed the globe spreading lies and slander about Cuba. Like Moore, Dr. Darsi Ferrer, who ran into trouble when he attempted to set up a medical clinic outside the state run medical system, has also sought to use race to undermine the gains, institutions and anti-racist direction brought about by the Cuban Revolution.

In 2006, Dr. Ferrer went to the US interest-section and was given a US-monitored email account (i.e. access to a CIA manipulated portal). Dr. Ferrer's reactionary blog along with links to reactionary websites such as Capital Hill Cubans, Blog for Cuba and kill castro.com can be found at <http://blogacionpordarsiferrer.blogspot.com/>. Moore, and the signers of the Declaration, ignore the decades-long struggle waged by the Cuban government against all forms of racism. This includes ignoring/denying Cuba's internationalist support of African, Caribbean and African American liberation struggles.

Moreover, Moore and his followers ignore the historical and present-day fact that Afro Cubans have not been a mere passive force, but have been and are central in the struggles to make and advance the Cuban Revolution. This attack on Cuba is an attack on a country that stood fast to its democratic, socialist, anti-racist and internationalist principles despite the great pressures from US and world imperialism, which has forced other countries to abandon these positions. It is clearly no coincidence that this attack on Cuba, comes at a time when so many throughout the US and internationally are being victimized by the policies and crises of capitalism and are seeing responses in Cuba and other countries throughout Latin America that seek to address the needs of the masses of people and not the banks and ruling classes as is being done in the US. This attack on Cuba is an attack on efforts to forge Black and Brown working class unity as the cornerstone of the democratic and socialist revolutions developing throughout Latin America.

It also furthers the US efforts to divide African Americans and Latinos as the major growing challenge to oppressive US domestic and foreign policies. For five hundred years prior to the Cuban Revolution, racism was the norm in Cuban society. To expect that it would completely disappear even in fifty years is a pipe dream. Indeed, as Fidel Castro, noted in 2003 in a dialogue in Havana with Cuban and foreign teachers: "Even in societies like Cuba, that arose from a radical social revolution where the people had reached full and total legal equality and a level of revolutionary education that threw down the subjective component of discrimination, it still exists in another form. "Fidel, as noted in the December 2, 2009 "Message From Cuba To Afro-American Intellectuals and Artists," described this as objective discrimination, a phenomenon associated with poverty and a historical monopoly on knowledge. The criticisms about the presence of racism in Cuba are being addressed within the framework of the Cuban Government and civil society. There is and has been fierce debates and policy changes INSIDE these structures when it comes to eradicating 500 years of racism in Cuba. Cuba's policies against any form of discrimination and in favor of equality are grounded in the Cuban Constitution. According to Afro Cubans:" As never before in the history of our nation, black and mestizo Cubans have found opportunities for social and personal development in transformative processes that have been ongoing for the past half a century. These opportunities are conveyed through policies and programs that made possible the initiation of what Cuban Anthropologist Don Fernando Ortiz, called then on- deferrable integration phase of Cuban society." (Message from Cuba to African American Intellectuals and Artists, 12/2/09)

The people of Cuba, in electing their representatives to the National Assembly, have chosen a very diverse group, including dozens of Black Cubans prominently working in many key roles. Indeed, the National Assembly of Cuba is so racially diverse that if Cuba was "suffering" from racism, how did these brothers and sisters get elected? Unlike when the Congressional Black Caucus was formed in 1970, this effort came out of the necessity here in the United States to continually defend the hard won Civil liberties and their rights to equal opportunities waged for centuries by African Americans. Unlike the signers of the December 1, 2009 Declaration, we have not forgotten that in the struggles against colonialism and apartheid, when Africa called, Cuba answered.

Unlike other friends of Africa, Cuba provided assistance to the people of Southern Africa, without brokering one deal for access to resources or anything else. Cuba's solidarity with the people of Southern Africa in the 1987/88 Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola was the decisive turning point in the defeat of apartheid. We remember and applaud Cuba's provision of teachers, technicians, doctors and other medical personnel along with free medical training to the young people of Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. During the past forty years, more than 35,000 African youth have been trained free of charge while studying in Cuban medical and technical schools as well as universities.

We the undersigned believe that the true callous disregard for the rights of citizens is taking place here in the United States, with Hurricane Katrina being the most glaring proof. In contrast Cuba was among the first countries to offer human and material aid during this crisis in 2005, aid that was in turn rejected by the U.S. government. The U.S. Government continues to spend billions of dollars on war abroad while neglecting African Americans and the poor who are generally subjected to substandard health care and education, the lack of decent and affordable housing, urban street violence and police brutality, crippling unemployment and jobs that people need to live decently.

Cuba is the ONLY country in the world to provide free medical training to United States students wishing to become doctors; providing full scholarships that include tuition, room, board and ALL incidentals. Many of these students are African Americans whose dreams of becoming doctors in order to serve their communities would never have been realized. We the undersigned call on African Americans to stand up in support of the Cuban Revolution and call on the U.S. Government to end its blockade on the Cuban people. We also call for African Americans to build a united front in the United States that addresses the ongoing historical callous disregard for the rights of African Americans and all people who are subjected to gross negligence in America. We call on the signers of Carlos Moore's Declaration to withdraw their names as an act of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and recognition of the valiant and consistent efforts by Cuba to eradicate racism. In closing we reaffirm our respect for the Cuban people's right to self-determination and sovereignty.

We the undersigned STAND WITH CUBA! Long Live The Cuban Revolution!

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 Franklin Flores, New York, NY Artist/Activist, Casa De Las Americas NYC
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