

Cooperation in the Development of an Independent Civil Society: a Pending Issue

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La Fundación is a non-profit organization founded in 1996, with a board of trustees made up of Spanish and Cuban representatives living in exile or on the island. Members include Gustavo Arcos (president), Raúl Rivero, Elizardo Sánchez, Oswaldo Payá, Marta Beatriz Roque, Vladimiro Roca, René Gomez Manzano and Félix Bone. These are people who represent an important part of the Cuban dissident movement and of independent civil society. The seat of the organization is in Madrid, and it has several branches in Spain and abroad.

La Fundación activities focus on three main goals. The first involves cultural activities — conferences, seminars and panel discussions. These activities take place weekly at the organization's headquarters, and other places in Spain and internationally. The publication of *Revista Hispano Cubana HC*, with a circulation of 3000 issues (of which 1000 are sent to Cuba) is also a main activity of La Fundación. The main purpose of the magazine is to offer independent civil society an opportunity to express itself. Many contributions included in the publication are written by people who work on the island and live in Cuba. The magazine is strategically distributed in Cuba and abroad, for example in the Spanish Parliament, numerous public libraries, universities and in spheres that create public opinion.

Secondly, the organization recently began an editorial project, with the goal of offering Cuban independent civil society an opportunity to express itself. Due to the amount of writing received from Cuba, La Fundación decided to edit and publish the work in order to distribute it on the island and make these voices, many of which remain unpublished, heard.

La Fundación, thirdly, invests a good deal in an assistance program for Cubans coming to Spain seeking asylum and refuge. The organization help these people find work, assists them in Spanish residence procedures and other necessary services.

Lastly, and most essentially, La Fundación sends material aid to the island. The aid mainly comprises of economic support, but it also includes computers, books and various materials to help different organizations that are part of the independent civil society fully develop their work with dignity. The organization also established the International Human Rights award of La Fundación Hispano Cubana (el Premio Internacional de Derechos Humanos de la Fundación Hispano Cubana). The award is a material reward for people who work on the island and fight there for human rights and liberation, and it is a symbol for all people working for these ideals on the island.

La Fundación is working to address key issues that support the Cuban people's fight for liberty and democracy. The first of these issues is connected to informational campaigns aimed at acquainting the public with the reality of life in Cuba. The ICDC Summit in Prague was an example of how much has been achieved in this area, but we must also recognize that the capacity of the dictatorial Cuban regime to reestablish its image is of enormous and absolute efficacy.

CORBALÁN COOPERATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY Many activities have been arranged in response to various kinds of repression or "misfortune" which the regime taught us to accept. The last of these was a reaction to the civil repression in March 2003 which caused general mobilization all over Europe, Latin America and the United States. It seemed as if the time of constant and continuous pressure on the regime of Castro had been initiated on the political, cultural-intellectual and finally on the social level. However, during the last year and a half we have seen how the regime has again returned to its usual discourse and politics. All the while, seventy-five, now seventy-nine, people are still imprisoned and others are confined to their homes.

Although the repression and harassment of independent civil society outside prison is immense, the regime nonetheless internationally maintains its traditional discourse, with no negative or destabilizing consequences. One of the activities La Fundación has initiated and is co-ordinating is support of constant and sustained pressure on the system in order to prevent the Cuban regime regaining its traditional discourse in terms of public opinion and the media.

When looking at current issues facing the Cuban civil society, aid to particular sectors must be examined. Priority number one should be the material aid sent to the island. It is one of the great gaps in the cooperation and support of the people fighting for Cuban democracy. The focus is presently on informational campaigns and current political events whilst the issue of direct aid to the island, which I believe is the essential activity, is buried and hidden underneath. If we talk to Vladimiro Roca, Oswaldo Payá or Marta Beatriz, we will find out that they have hardly any materials to work with.

The aid should focus on different levels. Firstly, of course, humanitarian aid must provide assistance and material aid to live on. Substantial aid is fundamental if we consider the isolation of the prisoners, their families and all the opposition civil movement. This is a necessity we should confront and resolve quickly, but it is not enough. It is absolutely vital to cooperate in the development of building and reinforcing civil society. Aid should address particular organizations on the island and enable them to work in dignified conditions. It is incredible that aid today represents such a ridiculously small amount. Support should be carried out in order to supply particular organizations with sufficient means to attend to their programs. The level of assistance required is and should not be the same for all organizations; although it is fundamental to cover their needs, more developed programs will require more help while others will need less.

Two years ago, for example, La Fundación presented the Manuel Márquez Sterling society of journalists with the FHC Human Rights award. The award was accompanied by an economic grant of 10,000 USD and in just a few months they were able to edit the first issue of the magazine De Cuba.

In our experience, any kind of help, especially financial help, sets in motion the mechanisms of the organization and enables them to accomplish their work. For the same reason it is very important to comply with petitions made on the island and to assist in their fulfillment. We have to act as a bodyguard of independent civil society and domestic opposition groups which are essential to our activities. Despite the fact that such groups are the basic reason for our existence, they are often disregarded. We must work to recognize the importance of such groups and coordinate help within the entire support movement of Cuban democracy.

Finally, La Fundación believes in fighting for the gradual dissolution of solidarity with the Castro regime. Recently, forty deputies created a group of amity between European Parliament and the regime. This is very common in Spain where hundreds of organizations are co-ordinated by the Cuban embassy. These organizations permanently receive visits from Cuban authorities who are given very important resources, that is to say huge amounts of money. This is insane as those NGOs that support the cooperation through international mechanisms include such organizations as the CDR (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución — Committee for the Defense of the Revolution). In contrast to the EU, the only authority that has control over all civil areas of power in Cuba is

the state; the regime grants itself the right to authorize and control all activities organized on the island.

CORBALÁN COOPERATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY In light of this, western societies in their respective countries should work towards the denouncement of this activity. The funds of cooperation are being misused for the support of a dictatorship. It is necessary to be very perceptive in order to assure that the aid sent by other countries is used for humanitarian assistance and real development cooperation. It must be shown abroad how the regime is using aid for its own subsistence and support.