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HAVANA.- The presence of solidarity groups from the United States in Cuba’s National Day of Rebelliousness (July 26) festivities has re-confirmed the solid commitment by organizations and individuals from the neighboring country to defend the Socialist Revolution.

Representatives of groups like the Venceremos Brigade and Pastors for Peace visited Cuba in an open challenge to the White House’s confrontational policies to experience the island’s reality firsthand and participate in celebrations to mark the 64th anniversary of the attacks on the Moncada and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes garrisons, for which this year’s main event was held in the western province of Pinar del Río.

During numerous encounters with the media and with the people, activists stated that the tightening of Washington’s Cuba policy, announced by President Donald Trump on June 16, had served to reinforce their determination to defend the Revolution and to demand an end to the U.S.-imposed economic, commercial and financial blockade.

By sharing moving experiences and reflections, Venceremos Brigade representatives compared Cuba’s socialist system with that of the US and sternly criticized the inequalities that seriously affect their country’s children, senior citizens and immigrant and African-American populations.

According to the activists, their periodic visits allow them to become acquainted with Cuban reality and facilitate their work to raise awareness, organize politically and mobilize support for the development project freely chosen and defined by the island nation.

Luis Barrios, a member of the U.S. inter-religious platform that formed part of the 28th U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan, said that “when it comes to Cuba solidarity work, Pastors for Peace has no vacation or spare time.”

The organization’s executive director, Gail Walker, said that this year’s solidarity initiative, first undertaken 25 years ago by Reverend Lucius Walker, was an expression of the willingness of social movements, religious organizations and individuals from the United States and other countries to defend Cuba’s right to build a peaceful future.

Activists from other countries joined the festivities to mark the aforementioned attacks in 1953 in Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo, respectively, under the leadership of Fidel Castro.

The attacks denoted the beginning of the armed struggle against the tyranny of Fulgencio Batista.

As an expression of its commitment to Cuba, the 16th Juan Rius Rivera Solidarity Brigade, from Puerto Rico, undertook voluntary work in agriculture and met with workers, combatants, young people, athletes and artists throughout the country.

The 60-strong group, led by the activist Milagros Rivera, paid tribute in the city of Santa Clara to Argentinean-Cuban Guerrilla Commander Ernesto Che Guevara, who was assassinated in Bolivia 50 years ago.

Moreover, the 47th European José Martí Brigade of voluntary work and solidarity with Cuba fulfilled a tight agenda to learn more about the country’s situation and its people.

Activists stayed at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, in the western province of Artemisa, where friends from around the world regularly share agricultural and other solidarity work experiences and express their support for Cuba’s right to construct its future in peace.

International Solidarity with Cuba Remains Solid Despite Trump

By Ernesto VERA MELLADO
"The Trump Factor" in Cuba-US Relations

By Diny Sanabia

WASHINGTON.-The second anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba last July 20 was notable for the backward steps in the bilateral relations as a result of Washington’s new stance.

Two months ago, US President Donald Trump announced some policy changes on the Caribbean nation to revert some of the progress promoted by his predecessor, Barack Obama, that started on December 17, 2014.

On that date, the then Democrat president and Cuba's Head of State, Raúl Castro, announced that both countries would open a process towards the normalization of relations.

Then, Havana and Washington conducted a range of talks on issues of mutual interest and reopened their respective embassies in the summer of 2015.

In the intervening years until last January 20, when Obama’s presidency ended and Trump took office, Cuba and the United States adopted 22 bilateral instruments to advance their declared common purpose.

As a result, both sides signed accords, memoranda of understanding and treaties on animal and plant health, migration, shipping safety, rescue operations, regular flights and the fight against drug trafficking.

Agreements were also reached on direct postal services, agriculture, healthcare, meteorology, seismology, protected sea and land areas and the twinning of the Ciénaga de Zapata swamplands with the Everglades national parks.

The two countries also signed a treaty on the demarcation of the Gulf of Mexico’s Eastern Continental Platform beyond the 200 nautical mile limit.

During the same period, both nations held over 50 technical meetings and cooperated on cybersecurity and the battles against drug trafficking, terrorism and migratory fraud.

Dialogue on other topics included maritime and aviation safety; environmental protection; assistance in the criminal field and the prevention of money laundering.

In excess of 20 round-table talks were also held on law enforcement and compliance, telecommunications, human rights, mutual compensation, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons.

The United States removed Cuba from its List of States that Sponsor Terrorism, and Raúl Castro and Obama met and talked on three occasions, the latest when the African-American president officially visited Havana, in March 2016.

Almost a week before the end of his term in office, Obama abolished the “wet foot- dry foot policy” and the parole program for Cuban doctors, which promoted hazardous and illegal migration to the US.

However, as the Cuban government has reiterated, the persistence of the US blockade of the island – a policy in place for almost six decades – continues to be the main obstacle for the normalization of bilateral relations.

Although Obama implemented several measures to modify the application of the economic, commercial and financial siege, he did not use all the available prerogatives and after Trump’s announcements of last June 16, Washington once again chose the path of confrontation.

The Republican president announced his government’s change of stance in the city of Miami, Florida, and after an inflammatory speech he signed a National Security Presidential Memorandum on the Strengthening of United States Policy on Cuba.

The document imposes further bureaucratic barriers to restrict travel by US citizens to the Caribbean island and the elimination of individual educational visits.

It also prohibits economic, commercial and financial transactions between US companies and Cuban entities linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces and intelligence and security services.

The Cuban government has stated that such obstacles are in addition to the already limited opportunities the US business community has to trade with and invest in Cuba.

On June 16, US federal entities published their guidelines on the changes in documents that included questions and answers on the new measures.

According to the Office of Foreign Assets Control, of the Department of the Treasury, regulatory amendments will be issued in the coming months and the changes would not come into effect until the relevant regulations are announced.

On “people to people” visits to Cuba by US citizens – now to be made only in groups, as individual visits are again prohibited – the reports indicate that travelers should maintain a complete schedule of their educational exchange activities.

These groups will be supervised by a representative of the entity organizing their stay on the island, something that had also been eliminated by the Obama administration.

Trump said that his strategy aims to enforce the prohibition on people from the US traveling as tourists to the Caribbean nation and to limit trade to “prevent money going to the Cuban State.”

Last July 14, Raúl Castro told the closing session of the 9th Ordinary Session of the National Assembly’s 8th Legislature, “it is evident that the US president has not been well informed on Cuban history, its relations with the United States nor about the patriotism and the dignity of the Cuban people”.

Raúl also cautioned that the US government has decided to intensify the blockade and to justify such measures with a return to an old and hostile Cold War rhetoric.

"Trump’s decisions do not reflect the support of large and important sectors in the US for the normalization of relations, and respond only to the interests of a small group of Cubans in southern Florida, which is smaller and more isolated every day, and which insists on harming Cuba and its people for defending, at any cost, its right to be free, independent and sovereign,” he added.
WASHINGTON.- The president of a US based coalition that promotes links with Cuba has told The Havana Reporter that “bipartisan support for the rapprochement with Cuba has grown steadily in the United States over the last two years, and will continue to do so.

James Williams, President of Engage Cuba, expressed his regret at the announcement by President Donald Trump last June to revert certain aspects of progress in bilateral relations, which he considers a step back on the path towards the normalization of relations.

He noted; however, that despite such moves, there is still strong support for efforts to continue working towards a closer relationship with the neighboring country, with which the United States re-established diplomatic relations on July 20, 2015.

“We are holding talks with Cuba as never before, and they are very different now to those of even two years ago,” Williams said. He described such progress as a great achievement for both countries and for the people in the US who believe that rapprochement is the path to follow after 55 years of a failed policy of restrictions.

He added that although some hardline politicians want to change things, it is obvious that the context can never be the same because of the progress made in areas such as enhanced air and cruise ship travel schedules, business exchanges and the increased number of US citizens who have visited the Island.

Williams, whose organization seeks to end the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by Washington on the biggest island in the Caribbean, added that if the Trump administration is not going to play a constructive role in the rapprochement process, others have to occupy that space and continue building bridges.

“I think we are already seeing this and we will see even more. More members of Congress and the government will travel to Cuba, as will others who perceive the ineffective leadership in this regard and want to take it up," he noted.

Commenting on the work underway by his coalition following the presidential announcement, he said that they are focusing on the regulations due to be issued over the coming months.

On signing his memorandum on Cuba, Trump said that travel by US citizens to the Island would be restricted and that economic, commercial and financial transactions between US companies and Cuban counterparts linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the intelligence and security services would be prohibited.

“The announcement made on June 16 was a political speech and a directive on presidential policy, but the interpretation of how it will be regulated is what will have the real impact,” Williams explained.

The Engage Cuba president wants the voices of Cuba’s people – including those of the private sector – to be heard.

This should not only be about norms designed in the wings by a group of politicians in Washington.

Williams stressed his hope that “bipartisan leadership would lead to this and that the White House, before making shadow arrangements, would engage with the public and listen to experts on both sides to promote real dialogue.”

“That would be the best path, that the governments sit together and talk, that people talk to each other and that the process is not controlled by a few,” Williams said that he was unsure about the role now to be played by agencies with responsibility for the new measures, as these were already alienated from the revision of the policy on Cuba.

“Will they have a role now? I hope so. Their technical experience is essential to the preparation of regulations, but that does not necessarily mean that the administration will listen to them,” he said.

He highlighted that Engage Cuba is endeavoring to explain to as many people as possible on Capitol Hill, in the White House, the agencies and the state governments why bilateral relations are so important.

“Most of the people involved are waiting for the new directives to be implemented three months after the presidential announcement, but anything could happen until then, because federal authorities have other tasks, problems and important issues to address," he added.

Williams concluded by saying that, in any case, because there is a limited time frame, they continue to work on ties to the neighboring nation as if tomorrow did not exist.
Havana.- The “Odyssey Race for Water”, a green energy powered boat, dropped anchor in Havana Bay as part of a 2017-2021 second circumnavigation of the globe.

During its stay in Cuba, The Race for Water Foundation sponsored project offered on-board workshops about plastic waste management and ocean conservation as well as guided tours of the 35m long vessel, thought to be the world’s largest hybrid catamaran.

The futuristically designed craft with its French crew and team of German and Norwegian scientists, visited Cuba between July 21 and August 8. Foundation director Serge Pittet said during the welcome ceremony that interactions related to the discovery of solutions to the problem of plastic waste pollution was one of their primary objectives.

He added that “team work and the raising of awareness about our reality are the keys to real change and the only true guarantee that we bequeath a better world to future generations.”

The Swiss Race for Water foundation is dedicated to water conservation and aims to identify, reinforce and implement solutions that add value to plastic refuse by creating new sources of income for those most adversely affected by contamination.

The project’s educational agenda promotes five basic ecologically-sound initiatives, among which figure suggestions to reject disposable plastic bags in favor of those made from renewable materials, to always carry a reusable shopping bag, to not dump plastic bags or cigarette ends in the street or down the drain and whenever possible, carry and use a flask.

Cuban children and youth had the opportunity for a first-hand learning experience about this novel project, the first such sun, wind and sea powered craft on the planet not to emit carbon dioxide into our atmosphere.

The visit was arranged jointly by Cuba’s Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, The Swiss Embassy in Cuba, the Cienfuegos Center for Environmental Studies and the Race for Water Foundation.

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Havana.- The Latin American Medical School (ELAM) is consolidating its role as a humanitarian project designed by the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, by graduating 28,500 physicians from 103 countries since 2005.

Each school year, the school, located in northwestern Havana, in what was formerly the Granma Naval Academy, makes Fidel’s dream come true by converting humble young students from Latin America, Africa and the United States into qualified health care professionals.

The school received its first students from Nicaragua in February 1999.

In the recently concluded 2016-2017 school year for example, 742 students from 71 countries received their certificates at the 13th graduation ceremony, attended by – among others – representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited in Cuba and members of the 28th U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan, The school’s academic deputy rector, Maritza González, urged graduates to echo the words of Fidel from more than 17 years ago, when he said, “you graduate with as much conscience as science and become, along with those who have graduated before you, protagonists of that great task, the international solidarity demonstrated by this small island.”

That, González said, was indispensable to reinforce the unity of our peoples’ and ELAM is building that unity for a more humane world, she added.

The Latin American Medical School’s primary purpose is to train general physicians to practice in the provision of primary care as the basis for their professional careers.

To that end, the project has modern laboratories, classrooms and auditoriums equipped with state-of-the art technology to guarantee that the doctors of the future are professionally trained.

In this regard, the academic staff expect the physicians, who receive high-quality scientific, humanitarian, ethical and solidarity-focused training, to work in their countries of origin and to contribute to the sustainability of their nations’ healthcare systems.

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ON BEHALF OF GRADUATES

Palestinian Doctor Areej Saab Azmi Alkhawaga said at the ceremony “you, our professors and staff, were our family during this long journey and as Fidel wished, we are now graduating as doctors for Cuba and for the world.”

Our time to leave has arrived, but we will always carry this island in our hearts, in our science and in our consciences. Wherever we are, we will thank Cuba for its support for our countries and especially my beloved Palestine. Thank you, ELAM.”

On behalf of the ELAM graduates’ parents, Azmin’s mother noted that the graduates had assumed their humanitarian responsibilities and were now committed to saving lives in their own countries.

Official statistics reveal that in the 2016-2017 school year, 14,685 medical professionals and health technicians, including 920 doctors from 79 foreign countries, graduated from Cuba’s universities of medical sciences.

Throughout the Revolution, an impressive total of 164,920 Cuban and 33,973 foreign physicians from 129 countries have graduated from such institutions.
Havana.- The Cuban Music Institute has declared August a “jazz month” and announced a series of special concerts at Havana’s emblematic “Alicia Alonso” Grand Theater on the last three weekends of the month.

The historic theater is hosting performances by renowned Cuban jazz musicians that will also feature concert music, in a popular expression of high culture.

The initiative to promote quality music is sponsored by Cuba’s Culture Ministry following a week long recognition of International Jazz Day in Havana, the high point of which was April 30.

The August concerts included performances by Chucho Valdés and Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Cuba’s most internationally renowned jazz musicians over the past few years.

Award-winning Valdés performed on August 12 and Rubalcaba – also an international prize winner – will play on August 19. Two luxury opportunities in the context of their very tight agendas, event organizers told The Havana Reporter.

They added that the program’s principal concert performance on August 26 will be by the Cuban pianist Hernán López Nussa and the Familia López Nussa project, which includes his brother Ruy and his nephews Harold and Ruy Adrian.

Another highlight promises to be “Jojazz in Concert”, a project conceived for emerging jazz musicians featuring saxophonist Michel Herrera, trombonist Eduardo Sandoval and pianist Alejandro Falcón, who will premiere pieces from their upcoming “Mi Monte Espiritual” album, for release on the Producciones Colibrí label.

Concert music performances will include Camerata Romeu, an all female ensemble directed by Maestra Zenaida Romeu.

These jazz concerts in August pay tribute to Cuba’s long musical tradition at the genre’s peak, thanks to the many musicians who are considered classical contributors to the creation of this music culture.

Cuba to Host 2nd Primera Línea International Music Forum

HAVANA.- The Cuban Music Institute (ICM), the Ministry of Culture and several local record companies are organizing the 2nd Primera Línea International Music Forum, which will bring together some 150 foreign delegates from September 20 to 23.

They will be joined by more than 400 Cuban experts at the Alejo Carpentier Hall of the Alicia Alonso Grand Theater of Havana, where an academic forum and a commercial fair to exhibit musical products and projects from the participating companies will take place.

The event, part of the WOMEX circuit (The World Music Expo), is sponsored by the German institution Endirecto and the Cuban record labels Egrem, Bis Music, Abdala and Colibrí.

According to organizers, the forum aims to showcase Cuban music and its potential and to promote possible working relations between those involved in the world music market and Cuban institutions as a means to hire artists.

The second edition of the forum will be dedicated to music professionals and will consist of concerts, called showcases, from which participants will be selected by a national and international jury that will choose 15 artistic units after visiting every music company in the country.

During the forum, experts from several countries will analyze new technologies on the music market, copyright management and free access to information, the management of musicians in light of current industry demands and the prospects for both recorded and live music.

According to the director of the Center for Research and Development of Cuban Music, Laura Vilar, the experts will also reflect on music genres and opportunities from all over the world, as well as on possibilities in Cuba.

The foreign delegates’ agenda will include visits to places of interest such as the country’s recording studios and live music venues.

After the event has closed in Havana, the foreign participants will visit Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Trinidad and Villa Clara, in western and central Cuba.
Cienfuegos Flag: A Constant Tribute to France from Cuba

By Francisco G. NAVARRO

CIENFUEGOS.- At the neoclassical façade of the Cienfuegos province Municipal Palace, a tribute is constantly paid to France and its Revolution, which this year celebrated its 228th anniversary.

It’s the local banner, whose colors are identical to those of the French flag. In addition to the architectonic values of the area that comprises the old Plaza de Armas – the heart of the historic centre, declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site in 2005 – the fluttering of the Cienfuegos flag also stands out in the environment; calling soon the attention of foreign visitors.

The similarity between both flags is justified by the fact that Cienfuegos, 240 km southeast of Havana, has the historic peculiarity of being the only place where the core of the original population was founded by French colonists in the Spanish-controlled Americas.

The origin of both banners also has a war and patriotic similarity. Marquis Lafayette designed the ‘strapo tricolor’ in 1794 to lead the freedom forces during the French Revolution, and so did Cienfuegos poet Clotilde del Carmen Rodríguez, who designed and made the province’s flag and gave it to her fellow countrymen who went off to the first war of independence, on February 7, 1869, against the Spanish colonial oppression.

Rodríguez, known in Cuba as ‘The Damajagua’ – in reference to the main river of the central-southern part of the country – sent the banner to her compatriot Federico Fernández Cavada (1831-1871), the leader of the Cienfuegos rebels who reached the rank of Mayor General and Head of the Liberation Army.

Lieutenant Colonel German Barrio Howard, Fernández Cavada’s first cousin, had the honour to bear the flag, for the first time in the free Cuban fields, when the patriots of the country’s central region joined the war of independence which landowner Carlos Manuel de Céspedes started in his small sugarcane mill “La Demajagua”, in Cuba’s east, on October 10, 1868.

The Cienfuegos flag has three vertical bands – blue, white and red, from left to right – in the same order as the national flag of France, though it also includes other semiotic elements. As a message of Christianity, the creator included a white cross on the first band’s blue background.

The central band carries the shield of the city, created in 1831 by Agustín de Santa Cruz, Cienfuegos’ first benefactor.

In the red band, Clotilde del Carmen included a solitary star, as white as the two triangles present in the flag.

The director added that “in addition to her career as a ballerina and founding teacher of schools that include the renowned Cuban ballet school, which has been declared an invaluable contribution to humankind’s heritage,” the tribute was also for her “work in the field of art therapies.”

García Castaño, who is also the director of the Dance Institute of the Rey Juan Carlos University, which was named after the world-famous Cuban choreographer, referred to Alicia Alonso’s creation of psycho-ballet, a therapy recognized by UNESCO.

For the intellectual who believes in transforming the world through art, Alicia Alonso’s greatness is not only due to her talent for reinventing classics and giving them new personalities, but also to her teaching and her work in the field of social integration through dance.

In what was a moving speech in Segovia, the Spanish flamenco dancer, choreographer and actress Cristina Hoyos, who was also awarded a World Ambassador of Dance title, expressed the gratitude of both for the acknowledgement. Hoyos, who joined the Antonio Gades company in 1969 and was his dance partner for two decades, said that having retired from the stage, “we both continue to dance inside.”
American artist Ben Jones at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Fine Arts Museum’s Universal Arts Building. Thru. Oct 23,

Exhibition by German painter Albert Oehlen, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Fine Arts Museum’s) Universal Arts Building (Groundfloor). Thru. Sep. 11

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**FAIR**

Arte en la Rampa Fair
Del 6 de julio al 3 de Septiembre

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**MUSIC**

Anfiteatro de La Habana
Musical Cats
Every Saturday and Sunday. 9:00 pm

Barbarám Pepito’s Bar

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Thursday Kelvis Barreto,
7:00 pm
Friday Summer special with Leo Vera in concert
5:00 to 7:00 pm /Mauricio Figueirêl, 10:00 pm
Saturday “La Rueda de la Fortuna” (Wheel of Fortune) with Martha Sánchez,
2:00 pm / Raúl Torres, 10:00 pm
Sunday: Discotemba Barbaram (Music from the 70’s, 80’s From 5:00 to 10:00 pm

Café Cantante Mi Habana

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Peña El Lobo y Los Corderos
Singer-songwriter Frank Martínez
Every Thursday at 9:00 pm

Centro En Guayabera
Alamar

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With singer songwriter Ray Fernández
Every Thursday at Tun Tun piano bar
(Calle 20 y 35, Playa)
From 5:00 to 9:00 pm
Fresa y Chocolate

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Diego Ulloa y su peña La pipa de la paz (The Pipe of Peace)
Every Friday
## AROUND

### CIRCUS

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<td>Alicia Alonso</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoologico de 26 Ave. 26, Nuevo Vedado</td>
<td>TrompocoTent</td>
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<td>Magic Gift</td>
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<td>Sat. 8:30 p.m. Sun. 5:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuba’s National Circus</td>
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<td>Back to Havana Fr. Sat. Sun. 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circo Nacional de Cuba.</td>
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<td>Cine Yara</td>
<td>Fantasias</td>
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<td>Sat./Sun. 3:00 pm</td>
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<td>Cuba’s National Circus</td>
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**GETTING AROUND**

- **Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonso**
- **Circo Nacional de Cuba. TrompocoTent**
- **Back to Havana Fr. Sat. Sun. 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.**
- **Zoológico de 26 Ave. 26, Nuevo Vedado**
- **Magic Gift**
- **Sat. 8:30 p.m. Sun. 5:00 p.m.**
- **Cuba’s National Circus**
- **Circo Fantástico**
- **Wed. Fri. 7:00 p.m.**
- **Teatro Apolo**
- **Cine Yara**
- **Fantasias**
- **Sat./Sun. 3:00 pm**
Havana. The National Museum of Fine Arts of Cuba is exhibiting more than 100 works by 40 artists on African-origin culture and its influence on this Caribbean country.

Opened on July 28 and to be on display until October 2, the exhibition, entitled "Without Masks, Afro-Cuban Contemporary Art", focuses on two major thematic lines: cultural and religious traditions of African origin in Cuba and the main race-related conflicts.

The creators of some of the artworks are Wifredo Lam, Belkis Ayón, Eduardo Roca, René Peña, Moisés Finalé, Lázaro Saavedra, Alexandre Arrechea and Juan Roberto Diago, among other artists.

According to the art critic, essayist and curator of the exhibition Orlando Hernández, the artworks occupy three halls of the Cuban Art Building of the museum.

As a complement to the exhibition, eight documentaries by the Cuban moviemaker, researcher, scriptwriter and producer Gloria Rolando will be screened in the vestibules of the temporary halls on the second and third floors, as well as 30 photos by the U.S. photographer Roberto Salas.

The collection was created in 2007 and covers several artistic expressions like installations, paintings on canvas and wood, watercolors, glass and enamel on aluminum paper, ink drawings and engravings, among other techniques.

Ciego de Avila, Cuba. In 1917, immigrants from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and other Caribbean islands arrived in the province of Ciego de Avila to work on sugarcane plantations.

They settled in the Baraguá municipality and established Jamaica Town, where today Cuba's highest number of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants and descendants is still located.

In order to preserve their traditions, on September 20, 1965, the La Cinta folklore group was founded, an important exponent of Caribbean music and dance in the country.

Made up of immigrant descendants, the group took its name from a musical theme in their repertoire, based on a legend created by the original settlers.

The story goes that Arianna was a beautiful, happy native Jamaican girl, who in her free time and at family parties sold multi-colored ribbons to wind around wooden sticks, to happy dancing buyers.

The group's repertoire today includes a number of different pieces about such colored ribbons and the agile dancers who masterly wind and unwind them around a wooden stick, without missing a step.

Making the maneuver as quickly as possible is the secret to success. Men and women dressed in brightly colored clothing and moving to a mix of rhythms, energetically and enthusiastically wind their ribbons.

Choreographies are richly complemented by sackcloth costumes and stilts, which add to the playful and intentionally ambiguous meaning of the songs, creating an attractive and popular spectacle.

On August 1st, the group celebrated the day when slavery was abolished in the English colonies of the Caribbean, with festive drumbeats, bongos, congas, and Calypso rhythms. The members of La Cinta that hosted the party beautifully showcased their colorful and uniquely Caribbean brand of folkloric song and dance.

The day opened with a demonstration of the game of cricket—an English bat and ball game inherited from their colonizers.

Afterwards, the now traditional parade behind the Donkey — a small donkey that invites neighbors to dance along the town's narrow streets — arrived at the main square to launch the festivities.

The celebrations in Baraguá - 460 km east of Havana – have become increasingly popular because a large number of people participate.

Throughout its history, the folklore group that grew organically, has passed traditions from one generation to the next and every year teaches children and youngsters how to keep them alive.

In 2001, the group won the National Community Culture Prize for its importance to the Cuban identity. It is also a regular participant in Santiago de Cuba's renowned Festival of Fire.

Today, everybody from Jamaica Town is committed to keeping their traditional dance, music, religion and cuisine alive.
Cuban Beaches, Summer’s Magnet

By Roberto E. CAMPOS

HAVANA.- Summer comes in Cuba and beaches still attract both Cubans and foreigners who want to have a great time on the Caribbean island.

Although Cuban tourism authorities make efforts to diversify recreational options, beaches are the focus of vacationers nationwide.

Coastal resorts have nearby access to other kinds of activities like trekking, excursions, circuits, even congresses and meetings, as well as options to improve the quality of life. These are great opportunities that are always available in this country.

Cuba has perfect coherences in its more than 200 beaches, among which Varadero and those in eastern Havana or on keys stand out.

Of Cuba’s 588 kilometers of beaches, 256 are part of 12 major tourist regions, with good hotels and nautical facilities to reinforce the country’s recreational development plans.

In addition to being recreational centers where tourists can take the sun, read under an umbrella or just take a nap, Cuban beaches have infrastructure that allows vacationers to practice several sports like sailing, motorbiking, kayaking, snorkeling and scuba diving, among others, in several nautical facilities.

Therefore, the best is to start the tour. Let us take an imaginary trip, which could become real, to that environment of magic and crystal-clear, well-preserved blue waters.

Let us mention some examples, because among Cuba’s most famous beaches are those considered an extension of Havana. They are part of a special strip of sand and sea about 20 minutes by car from any hotel in the capital.

There are several beaches along that route, after crossing the Havana Tunnel, by a beautiful coastal landscape bordering the peripheral neighborhoods of La Habana del Este, Alamar and Cojímar. The sandy silhouette can be seen farther, in the background.

They are at least 18 kilometers of beaches with a very good hotel and recreational infrastructure, above all to practice nautical sports. The beaches are Tarará, Bacuranao, Mégano, Boca Ciega, Santa María del Mar, Guanabo and, a little bit farther, along the same coastline, Arroyo Bermejo.

Meanwhile, Varadero, in western Matanzas province, is undoubtedly Cuba’s most famous coastal resort, at least, that is what many foreigners who visit the island frequently think about it.

It is Cuba’s sun and beach destination par excellence, with a hotel infrastructure that is appropriate and growing, in addition to areas where several nautical sports can be practiced.

Varadero is on the Hicacos Peninsula, where Punta de Morlas, Cuba’s northernmost tip, is located.

Jardines del Rey, in central Cuba, the beaches in eastern Holguín province or those in Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) are part of a long list of coastal resorts whose popularity increases during the summer season.

There are three marinas in Varadero: Dársena Varadero, Chapelín and Gaviota. The latter, located on the tip of the peninsula, is the largest one, with piers and impressive accommodation facilities (Gaviota Marina Varadero). Therefore, it is usually the scenario for yachting, sailing and catamarans, in addition to diving.

Jardines del Rey, in central Cuba, the beaches in eastern Holguín province or those in Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) are part of a long list of coastal resorts whose popularity increases during the summer season.

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Oscar López: Unbroken and Unbowed By 36 Years In Prison

Waldo MENDILUZA

UNITED NATIONS.- Having spent almost 36 years in US jails – 12 in solitary confinement –, Oscar López Rivera’s remarkable passion and strength remain intact and he believes that Puerto Rican self-determination is now more important than ever.

His Caribbean homeland, subjugated by colonialism for over five centuries, has lived for the past 119 years under the yoke of US domination.

Talking to The Havana Reporter from the UN headquarters, the pro-independence advocate said that “prison was very complex, but on release I see that the situation facing the land of my birth is even more difficult now than at the time of my detention.”

According to López Rivera, when he returned to his homeland – following the commutation of his sentence by the then US president Barack Obama, in January 2017 – he found more unemployment, social insecurity and privatization, phenomena that lead to mass emigration and the exodus of professionals and qualified staff.

He said that as there are presently five million Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora and less than 3.5 million on the island, an imbalance that further stimulates depopulation, as happened in the cases of Hawaii and Alaska where native aboriginals were replaced.

In the opinion of the 74-year old patriot, in spite of some harsh realities, there is a stronger reason to continue the struggle and the call for the unity of his compatriots and world solidarity against US colonial control.

“For the first time, the United States has openly demonstrated that we are a colony subject to a US mechanism created to pick the last dollar out of Puerto Rican pockets,” he denounced.

“In that face the governor obtained only two thirds of the votes he received in the November elections – just six months previously, showing that the Puerto Rican people do not support the political maneuvering of this government,” he stressed.

**APPRECIATION**

Since his release, López Rivera has acknowledged the solidarity of people from all over the world who advocated for his freedom and supported his cause. During the interview, he particularly thanked Cuba.

The patriot said “I want to express my appreciation to the Cuban people and to their government.”

He is pleased about the possibility of visiting Cuba on the invitation of President Raúl Castro in a May 18 message in which he congratulated Rivera after his freedom was made official.

“If everything goes on well, I hope to go in November, to personally thank president Raúl Castro and express my gratitude to the Cuban people for their support for the campaign for my freedom, but especially for their historic solidarity with Puerto Rico.”

He also highlighted the support lent to Puerto Rico by the deceased revolutionary leaders Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, and by other Latin American statespersons.

On June 19, López Rivera attended a session on Puerto Rico at the UN Special Committee for Decolonization, a 29 State member organization created in 1961 that for the 36th occasion since 1972, approved a resolution in favor of independence and self determination for the small Caribbean island.

BRASILIA.- Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT) has said that the nation has never before witnessed judicial, media and political persecution as overwhelming as that being faced by former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The PT added in a statement following a Curitiba federal judge’s order to confiscate the PT founder’s goods and valuables, that having sentenced Lula without evidence and by spreading lies and contradicting his own decisions, Sergio Moro had decided to take even further revenge on an innocent.

By freezing Lula’s assets, Moro decreed a penalty of economic asphyxiation that deprives the former president of his house and his means to survive and defend himself against false accusations, the statement reads.

The PT robustly condemned this new mean-spirited and arbitrary measure by Moro, “acting in complicity with the Globo Network to commit any kind harmful action against the country’s most popular leader.”

The former president’s defense lawyers have described the federal judge’s verdict as illegal and abusive and recalled how, even though it had been made on July 14, he kept it in secret until the media made it public.

They explained that in practice, this decision prevents Lula from accessing all his goods and valuables, which affects the existence of his family as well as his own. The new arbitrary decision is just one of many made by the same judge against the former president.

According to defense lawyers, a measure of this nature can be justified only if there is evidence that the patrimony would be at risk of being diminished; therefore, they will appeal the decision.

Brazil’s 247 digital newspaper reported that the Central Bank froze 606,727 reales (about $190,000) in four separate bank accounts.

In addition, two automobiles, three apartments and a plot of land, all in San Bernardo del Campo (Sao Paulo) where Lula lives, have been confiscated.

On July 12, Moro sentenced the former Brazilian president to nine and half years in prison on alleged passive corruption and money laundering charges.

Lula’s defense lawyers have charged that he is the victim of a politically motivated trial that is an attack on both the rule of law and Brazilian democracy.

Lawyers Cristiano Zanin Martins and Valeska Teixeira Zanin Martins explained that Lula had been sentenced without any credible evidence that he was guilty, while overwhelming proof of his innocence had been blatantly ignored.

Lula, who was in office from January 2003 through January 2011, has been at the center of an obviously biased investigation of a political nature by Moro, whose decisions shame Brazil by ignoring solid proof of the former president’s innocence and constantly violate basic human rights and due process.
HAVANA.— Both nations recently signed a letter of intent to strengthen commercial, industrial and technical cooperation in the sector.

Ling Chengxing, president of China’s State Tobacco Monopoly, has told The Havana Reporter that even though Cuban cigars are well known all over the world, they are even more so in his own country.

The executive was on a visit to production facilities at the Cohiba El Laguito cigar factory — a former mansion in that part of Havana of the same name — in each of which he evaluated the work and the development of the product from destemming to its preparation prior to rolling and the finishing, ringing and boxing.

Having met with Justo Luis Fuentes, president of the Cuban Tobacco Company Group, its first vice-president, Miguel Vladimir Rodríguez and other directors at the Cohiba El Laguito, Chengxing signed the letter of intent with Inocente Núñez Blanco y Luis Sánchez, co-presidents of the Cuban-Spanish joint venture Habanos S.A.

The purpose of Chengxing’s visit was to establish the basis for further cooperation between Cuba and China in this sector and it also served to identify the potential for even greater collaboration.

Cuba presently exports 200,000 cigars to China, although demand there is significantly higher and estimated to be for between five and seven million units, the reason why talks focused on the concession of an increased Chinese sales quota for Cuba.

Habanos S.A has had an office in China for more than a decade and its Cohiba brand has a market presence in 11 of the Asian Giant's provinces.

Market research results indicate that exports to China could account for 10% of Cuba’s global cigar sales.

In a synopsis of his recent visit, Chengxing said: “We have just signed the letter of intent between the Cuban and Chinese bodies, which expresses a shared desire to promote commercial, industrial and technical cooperation and to make the necessary efforts to ensure that agreed mutually beneficial actions are seen through.”

The executive described sectorial bilateral relations as close, saying that they had come to Cuba, satisfied and happy about the friendship between the governments and people of both countries and added that this agreement represented a significant boost for this particular branch of trade.

He stressed the importance of ensuring that the agreed actions were realized for the benefit of both sides.

Habanos S.A’s co-presidents also hailed the strategic importance of the document signed, which will enhance cooperation in the longer term, with both sides optimistic that it will lead to an increase in the number of cigars imported by China from next year.

Cuba presently sells premium hand made cigars in more than 150 countries worldwide and has its own distribution units in 70% of its major markets.
Cuban Tourism Up, Up and Away
By Roberto F. CAMPOS

Cuban tourism continues to grow steadily with 4.7 million arrivals forecast for 2017. On July 25, industry authorities announced that three million holidaymakers had arrived, lending credence to the aforementioned prediction of 4.7 for million this year.

That number was achieved 73 days earlier than in 2016, a 24 percent increase on last year, during which Cuba reported a record 4.2 million foreign tourists for the first time.

Since June, tourism officials have highlighted the increased number of people from all over the world who want to vacation on the Caribbean island and that the tourism boom in Cuba is ongoing.

The general director for Development, Investments and Business at Cuba’s Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), José Daniel Alonso, explained that the first semester was forecast to conclude with a 22.2-percent increase; that is, 2.53 million foreign tourists, a number well surpassed.

That number ensured that the 4.2 arrivals planned for 2017 would be fulfilled.

The official added that in May, the country had 67,792 hotel rooms and that two new hotels had opened this year, including the Gran Manzana Kempinski in Havana.

He further added that by the end of the year, Cuba will have 68,200 hotel rooms and has plans to have 100,000 by 2030.

Cuba has a strong program for the development of the hotel and extra-hotel sectors, and for the first time, foreign companies like Meliá and Iberostar can administer groups of hotels in smaller cities. These will include hotels in the central city of Cienfuegos and the eastern cities of Camaguey, Gibara and Santiago de Cuba.

The plan prioritizes nature and nautical circuit tourism facilities.

Alonso also pointed out that the support for private accommodation continues and that there are more than 22,500 rooms, available in the sector, only exceeded by the Gaviota Group, the hotel chain in Cuba with most rooms (27,000) on offer.

Tourism authorities have plans to further develop destinations like Viñales (west) and Trinidad (center), two particularly attractive locations for those wanting to spend their vacation in Cuba.

He referred also to new planned investment projects that include 224 hotels, more than 32 expansion plans and the remodeling, enlargement and construction of 23 nautical centers and marinas by 2030.

There are also 24 real estate, two of which are marina related, 47 adventure tourism sector and 17 camp site related projects.

Havana tops the investment list with projects such as the inauguration of the Packard Hotel planned in 2018 and the Prado y Malecón Hotel in 2019. Others like the Hotel Aeropuerto and new projects in Miramar and Mariel are also in the pipeline.

MINTUR is concentrating on the promotion of circuit, nature, cultural and historic tourism, improving service quality and the development cruise holidays, health tourism and nautical activities.

A new portfolio of investment opportunities, consisting of 140 identified projects, will be presented at the FITCuba Havana International Fair 2017, in November. Alonso said that 114 hotels presently operate under foreign administration contracts and account for 66.8 percent of Cuba’s total rooms.

There is also growth in the area of Theme and Aquatic Parks, with options like the Crystal Tower and the Cable Ski on Cayo Coco now available.

The MINTUR official revealed that other similar amusement parks in Varadero and Havana are planned.

The former will be the Quixote Park and for people of all ages, an addition to the country’s tourist spectrum for both the hotel and circuit client.

This information is based on present statistics, but many analysts expect an even greater increase in tourist numbers going forward.

MINTUR STATISTICS FROM FITCUBA 2017

The FITCuba 2017, the 37th International Tourism Fair, was held in the eastern province of Holguín in early May.

At the opening ceremony, Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero announced that two million foreign visitors had arrived 39 days earlier than in 2016.

As a result, Cuba’s authorities reported a new record of visitors and an increase of 15 percent at that time.

Marrero outlined that of the 67,000 hotel rooms then available on the island, 7,000 had been remodeled and 2,000 redecorated last year.

He added that in addition to the state-owned hotels, there were 2,000 private restaurants, known as “paladares”, and more than 21,000 rooms in private homes.

He reiterated that Canada continues to be Cuba’s primary source market, accounting for 34 percent of the total number of arrivals and added that during the first quarter of the year, the United States and Canada had shared 45 percent of total tourist arrivals.

Other major markets are Europe with 33 percent of arrivals and Latin America, with 16 percent.

Foreign visitor statistics show that an 18-percent increase in the number of arrivals from the United States had been recorded, even though its citizens can only visit Cuba under 12 categories approved by their government; none of which permit tourism.

Marrero emphasized that in the first quarter of 2017, customer surveys indicated that 97 percent of visitors were satisfied with the Cuban tourism product and 86 percent with the quality-price ratio. Moreover, 96 percent would recommend the Caribbean island as a destination.

The minister noted that 68 airlines fly to and from Cuba, offering connections with 70 major cities around the world.

He added that 25 cruise ships operate in Cuba and that eight more will join soon, accounting for 265 berths and more than 170,000 passenger arrivals.

Biomas-Cuba Leads The Way
By Samuel ROBERT

HAVANA. Works funded by two domestic and the Swiss Cooperation and Development Agency (COSUDE) at Cuba’s Hatuey Indian Experimental Station, an international project for the integrated production of food and biodiesel from a non-food source, are well underway.

A global challenge is being confronted to harmonize agro-energy and food production with care for the environment.

Integrated farming practices can contribute to the search for a solution by becoming a source of both biofuel and food. Biomass can be converted through the exploitation of a bio-refinery into a range of useful value-added products that can also promote local development.

In an exclusive interview with The Havana Reporter (THR), professor Jesús Suarez Hernández, a researcher at the Hatuey Indian Experimental Station in the western Cuba province of Matanzas, explained that these are objectives that Biomás-Cuba is endeavoring to realize and that it has already attained critical technological transfer and innovative development results.

Suarez, who directs the running of the project, said that the biodiesel is produced from the non-edible Jatropha Curcas plant (locally known as Pirón de Botija) which also has a number of other significant uses.

He said that the experimental program included a 430 hectare Jatropha Curcas and 21 associated food production plantations in six municipalities in as many provinces, envisaging the construction of five units to produce this biofuel, two of which are already operational, each with a daily capacity of up to 400 liters.

Biomás-Cuba is working closely with the Pharmaceutical Laboratories Company Group, which provides a qualified workforce, farm machinery and other resources to the project.

Suarez confirmed that the biodiesel can be used as a lubricant and has almost the same calorie value as diesel.

He stressed that it is obtained from the non-edible plant source to attain fuel self-sufficiency for farm’s tractor and machinery.

The professor added that the project is based on the conception of the use of suitable technologies for the integrated production of both food and fuel, the enhancement of life quality, production cost savings, clean energy and lower pollution levels.

In addition to fuel production for rural communities, the project also incorporates the production of converted biogas and bio-fertilizers from anaerobic porcine effluent biodigesters.

The expert also told THR that Biomás-Cuba may integrate the three processes: biodiesel production, biogas (for both fuel and soil enrichment fertilizer production) and biomass.

For the latter, Marabu, the residue from tree felling, timber and rice industries will be used to generate electricity and heat for use in the grain drying process.

Suarez stressed that the results of the project that is being implemented to differing degrees in six provinces aim to improve the quality of life through the ecologically sound and integrated production of energy and food.

He concluded this exclusive interview by revealing that funds from a group of countries and organizations, the European Commission and the UN Development Fund were being employed in projects underway or on the way, in line with the access to energy, food security and climate change related Sustainable Development Goals numbers 2, 7 and 13, respectively.
Promising Young Cuban Athletes

By Alejandro MARTÍNEZ

HAVANA.- An unprecedented performance at the Under-18 World Athletics Championships in Nairobi, Kenya, has returned Cuba to sports page headlines.

The Caribbean nation finished third overall with an impressive tally of five golds, two silvers and a bronze, behind only South Africa (5-3-2) and China (5-2-4).

Once again exponents of the triple jump shone brightly, bringing home a gold for Jordan Diaz (17.30m) and a bronze for Zulía Hernández (13.29). In the long jump Maikel Vidal (7.88) and Lester Lescay (7.79) took gold and silver, respectively.

Since they first commenced back in 1999 and over the past 10 Under-18 World Championship events, Cuba’s triple jumpers have collected the most prolific tally of field sports medals with the grand total of six titles, complimented by two silver and five bronze medals.

Indeed, this time around, it was in field events that Cuba won all its medals, which bodes well for this sector’s state of health, despite an obvious almost three decade long drought of promising sprint and middle distance athletes.

The other Cuban’s to stand aloft on the podium were Silinda Morales (52.89 m) and Amanda Almendáriz (71.12m) in discus and hammer throwing respectively and Mariselysis Dutarhe (62.92) in the javelin.

The second silver was won by Yaritza Martínez (69.75), also in the hammer event.

Despite the absence of world power-houses such as the US and the UK due to current tensions arising from criminality and the threat of terrorism in the African host nation, Cuba by far surpassed its previous best performance in Marrakech, Morocco, 2005, where it took a 3-2-2 total.

This recent performance has reawakened the dreams of the island’s sport’s fans that the former days of glory -- such as when Enrique Figueroa gave the Island its first Olympic medal with a silver in the 100m in Tokyo-1964, following the Triumph of the Revolution -- may be on the way once again.

For decades, whenever Cuba has participated in such events, track and field sports have been a fundamental bulwark for the Island’s medal harvest and have throughout contributed such global emblematic figures such as the aforementioned sprinter Figueroa, hurdler Alejandro Casahayas and runner Alberto Juantorena.

Between the 1960’s and the 1980’s javelin thrower María Caridad Colón, Latin America’s first Olympic champion in the discipline, and sprinter Silvio Leonard stand out, as Ana Fidelia Quiot, Iván Pedroso and the legendary high jumper Javier Sotomayor, the unique double outdoor (2.45 m) and indoor world record holder, even more so do.

Although perhaps not quite so prolific, the decades of the 2000’s produced athletes of the caliber of triple jumper Noel García, Osleidy Menéndez (javelin), hurdlers Anier Garcia and Dayron Robles, as well as Yipsi Moreno (hammer throwing) and current world pole vault champion Yarislely Silva, among other world and Olympic champions.

Cuba’s Latest Young Volleyball Stars

By Alfredo BOADA

HAVANA.- Once again fielding a very young team, Cuba took the bronze medal at the men’s 12th Pan American Volleyball Cup, at the Robert Guertin Arena in the southeastern Canadian province of Quebec.

Playing in front of the enthusiastic local crowd that turned out for the event, the Cubans overcame an equally young home team by three sets to one (25-18, 25-21, 22-25 and 25-23) in their last appearance at the tournament, a closely fought encounter of an almost two hour long duration.

A virtually inexperienced Cuban sextet managed to overcome the psychological setback of their defeat (3-1) by Puerto Rico, having previously beaten a powerful US squad in the Group A preliminaries, to reach the semifinal stage with no loss.

This was the first time that Cuba and Canada -- who respectively had won gold and bronze medals at the previous edition of the Cup -- had faced each other in the Senior’s regional tournament.

Having taken an historic third place in the 2017 World League, Canada gave some younger players an outing on this occasion, while the Cuban team included seven players from their Under-21 world runner-up panel.

The leader of a Cuban squad that featured players who will soon take part in the Under-23 World Championship, was corner striker Miguel Ángel López with 21 points, while Miguel David Gutiérrez, his opposite, scored 16, three of which resulted from his serve.

Captain Liván Osorio and relief striker Javier Jiménez contributed 10 points each to Cuba’s winning total.

Ryan Sclater was Canada’s most valuable player and highest point scorer of the game with 25, followed by Blake Scheerhoorn with 12.

After the win, the young player and recent World Under 21 silver medallist, Miguel Ángel López, said “we wanted a good result, to be on the podium and we achieved that. This was an unforgettable experience for those of us playing in a Senior’s tournament for the first time.”

He added that the team could have done better, but were happy with the bronze and would now concentrate on the World Under-23’s in Egypt and the Norceca Pre World event.

Nicolás Vives, the Cuban team’s technical director, said that his players has recovered well mentally from their defeat, which was important for any team and especially so for such a young one. The squad had improved in the manner they that had adjusted to the setback and had fulfilled their goal by winning a medal, he added.

Canadian team trainer Larry McKay described the game against Cuba as a good lesson for his players. He added that they had at times risen to the level of the Cuban squad, something he said was significant for that group.

The regional tournament was won for a first time by Argentina who overcame the Puerto Ricans -- who eliminated the US in the quarter finals -- with a 3-1 (25-23, 25-18, 23-25, 25-20).


With a win in what was also a 5 game (22-25, 25-16, 23-25, 25-17, 15-13) clash with Mexico, who finished eighth and last, Venezuela took the 7th.
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