

Human Rights Watch Denounces Cuba for Human Rights Violations

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Denunciations of human rights violations against Cuba have become routine in the West. For decades, governments, NGOs and activists have denounced the Cuban government for various attitudes of abuse of universal rights, but the sources of such reports and evidence of crimes remain weak and vague. Once again, the NGO Human Rights Watch issued a report warning of an alleged “abusive” situation with regard to human rights on the island – and again the evidence is weak and reveals an ideologized action.

Every year, Human Rights Watch releases its global reports, covering all regions of the planet and warning against alleged human rights violations worldwide. In its 2021 edition, published on January 13, in the topic dedicated to Cuba, several crimes were reported, including alleged arbitrary arrests on the island, lack of freedom of expression, presence of political prisoners in Cuban penitentiaries, travel restrictions and several others acts that are presented to international society as frequent and structural in Cuba.

There are explanations for Human Rights Watch’s frontal opposition to Cuba, which are little publicized in the international media. In the past, the Cuban government has accused the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) of funding more than 20 organizations to promote complaints and defamations against the Latin country, including HRW. NED’s ties to the CIA prompted the Cuban government to veto agents from organizations linked to the NED into the country. In fact, regardless of whether or not there is a plot against the island organized by the NED and the CIA, it is clear that HRW’s annual reports are focused on denouncing and criticizing emerging countries, especially non-aligned nations, anticipating coercive measures taken by the US and other Western powers. This led Havana to endorse the narrative that HRW creates justifications for subsequent coercive measures with its allegations of human rights violations.

The central problem for the credibility of HRW reports is the authenticity of the organization’s sources. The reports are based on data provided by anti-government activists who are ideologically committed to the end of communism and the triumph of American interests on the island. To this end, such activists, who work inside and outside Cuba, adulterate, exaggerate or even create data that does not correspond to the reality of the country, as has been reported several times by Havana. The speech of anonymous activists follows a model predefined by American agencies interested in the fall of the Cuban

government. This speech is disseminated by human rights NGOs and finally justifies coercive measures by the American government. For this reason, Havana sees HRW as a threat to its national security and this will not change, even if Washington strengthens its sanctions even further, as there is a central ideological incompatibility between these countries that cannot be overcome with mere coercive maneuvers.

Exaggeration is certainly the greatest weapon of these agents. Surely, there are human rights violations in Cuba – just as there are in any nation. There is no country that has been successful in completely abolishing acts contrary to human rights. Many nations may have officially abolished such practices, but they certainly still exist unofficially and, equally, deserve investigation and criticisms. However, this persecution against “human rights violators” is generally applied when the charged state is an emerging nation geopolitically opposed to Washington, like Cuba. In this way, NGOs like HRW observe cases of violation and exaggerate them, claiming that there is a state policy to confront universal rights, when, in fact, they are only marginal practices that exist in any country.

Just as mistakes are exaggerated, merits are ignored. Cuba has some of the best social indicators on the American continent, being a global reference in education and with some of the most qualified medical professionals in the world. Havana is responsible for several humanitarian missions sending doctors and equipment to nations in need of medical care, including not only poor countries, but developed states in emergencies, such as Italy during the pandemic. Furthermore, Cuba seems to be advanced in many agendas exalted in the West. For example, women occupy 51% of the deputies in the National Assembly and are 62% of the country’s scientists – which are remarkably high numbers by Western standards. These indices show that, with or without structural disrespect, there is undeniable progress in terms of human rights, and this cannot be ignored.

However, Havana is right to think that HRW’s reports are not by chance. What we should expect for the future is the resurgence of a focus of tensions between Washington and Havana. Trump, in his last days in government, reversed a process of rapprochement between the countries when he considered Cuba again as a terrorist financing nation – a totally unreasonable accusation and without any material evidence, which Trump certainly did not believe, but made this decision as a strategic maneuver to harm Biden and transfer power to his successor with more international tensions. Biden promised to review Trump’s policy against Cuba but gave no details of exactly what points he will reform. However, a peaceful policy for Havana was never expected from the new American president. Biden’s reforms are likely to occur, more likely, to facilitate the flow of migration and to include “humanitarian” issues in relations, shifting the focus of tensions from a security and defense perspective to one of respect for human rights and democracy.

In practice, this means that Biden must try to harm Cubans even more by imposing international sanctions in order to force Havana to comply with humanitarian standards that are already respected but whose compliance will never be recognized by NGOs committed to the American government.

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