

CUBA AND CIVIL DEFENSE -

AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL COUNTRIES TO LEARN FROM

**The Cuba government has one of the best, if not the best, Civil Defenses in the world. The United Nations confirms this.**

**So why does Harper and the Canadian government – blindly copying the Bush administration of refusing to send aid to the Cuban government which it calls corrupt — except to NGOs?**

**The Cuban government is one of the least corrupt governments – their elected leaders ‘put their money where their mouth is.’**

**Not like the promises of our politicians.**

**Excerpts from Susan Hurlich’s email updates on Hurricane Gustav/Ike (from Havana) Sep/08**

**An important part of Cuba's system of Civil Defense - perhaps the key thing that truly makes it work well - is that the country has created a culture of prevention, a culture of protection, and a culture of collective recuperation. These are not insignificant things. In creating this culture, it's created a consciousness among the people, the simplest of whom are exceedingly wise about what to do, when and how. It's also created a culture of collectivism. People take care of each other, they're aware of each other, they're not "in it" only for themselves. And there's no "show", no "taking credit". It's simply the way things are. Those of you who have lived here or visited here have seen this for yourselves, in one way or another.**

**A culture of caring. It has nothing to do with whether or not you like a particular individual, nothing at all. A culture of caring is simply about the recognition that "the other" has the same value as a human being as you do, the same right to live and "take space" in the world. Cuba has developed this to a very high degree, and it shows brilliantly at times like this.**

I've been getting lots of emails and phone calls from people all over - for which I deeply thank you. Not only is it heartening to know the tremendous outpouring of concern for Cuba and the Cuban people that many are feeling, but the personal support is also helpful to me.

**And when I told some Cuban friends about the recuperation assistance that Canadian groups and individuals are already mobilizing, they said they were very touched by this. One person even cried, saying that the hand of solidarity and friendship from outside the country is one of the things that helps Cubans get through this.**

**But listen to this. Here's what one friend said: "Sitting here comfortably in Toronto it all seems a bit unreal, and I don't think we will get much information from the standard media, as**

**Cuba**

**is not given much shrift. Besides, when the death toll is substantial elsewhere, the relative sparing for Cuba makes it seem like small potatoes, since nobody bothers to ask why the same storm leads to relatively few casualties."**

**Sad, but true, eh? Here Cuba has one of the finest, if not THE finest, Civil Defense system in the world - the proof is in the pudding, as they say, and statistics don't lie.**

***[Editor: The United Nations confirms this.]***

**Cuba loses very, very few people when hurricanes strike. Part of the reason, and if I've said this before, that's ok, as it bears repeating, is that not only does Cuba have a highly efficiently organized Civil Defense system, developed since 1963 when the horrendous Flora struck eastern Cuba and left thousands dead in its wake, but the people have confidence in their Civil Defense system. You can legislate a Civil Defense system. But you can't legislate the confidence of the people. That's something that is GAINED, over the years, through proven action.**

**So what's happened is that while there is a Civil Defense system, it's as if ALL the people, the entire population, is actually part of the Civil Defense system. There's no panic. There's no running chaotically. People know what they have to do and where they have to do, and they do it in a timely way. And the Civil Defense authorities know where everyone is. Everyone is accounted for. No one is invisible. No one is without a name.**

**Some examples:** Civil Defense has a very good idea of what areas need to be evacuated,

what areas are potentially vulnerable to inundations, penetration of the ocean, flooding, landslides, etc. They know how many people are there. And the evacuation centres are prepared in time. That's the key: in time. The other key is: organization and discipline. The final key: confidence. As always happens, at least 85% or more of the people to be evacuated wind up going to the homes of friends or family elsewhere.

But Civil Defense knows this! When they give evacuation figures, they're able to say, always, that such-and-such a number of people are in the evacuation shelters, and such-and-such a number of evacuees are sheltered in homes of family or friends. No one is invisible. Shouldn't that be a normal thing? That no one is invisible? Shouldn't that be something that people should just be able to assume?

Why is it that the normal, the human, has become revolutionary? Shouldn't it just be part of being human? Unfortunately, as we know all too painfully, it's not. For instance, we don't even know how many really died in New Orleans during Katrina! Isn't that a crime? Of course! And the silence, at both official levels as well as in the press...

...I realized that after sending out my last update, with the list of "firsts", there was an important one that I didn't mention. As you know, Cuba's phone capacity and quality has been greatly improving over the past number of years, thanks to a substantial agreement with and investment from Italy [ editor: as the US blockade prevented Cuba from repairing/updating the original US installed phone systems].

This year, for the first time, the national ETECSA phone company is offering the population an additional service: special phone numbers which, from anywhere in the country, can link right into Radio Reloj for up-to-the-minute news and weather reports on the hurricane, as well as other news. There are also special numbers for reporting problems with the telephone or electricity. Perhaps your phone doesn't work, but someone else's does. It's a new service and one that is being highly appreciated and used by the population. For Radio Reloj, there's no waiting. The calls go through immediately.

Which brings me to a final comment about Cuba's Civil Defense system: it's dynamic, responsive, fluid, flexible, always searching for ways to improve how it functions, the services that are provided to the population.

In Cuba, it's impossible to be invisible, impossible to be silent. No one can simply disappear. Even if the anti-Cuban press wants to make us think that there's no landmass between  
Haiti  
and  
Jamaica  
and  
Florida  
, we know it's there. And it's called  
Cuba  
!

And what's most "threatening" about it is that it shows that some things can be done well - and Civil Defense is one of them.