

What I saw in Cuba was resilience

by Gerardo Delgado*



Gerardo Delgado.
(Picture ma)

(CH-S) For 66 years, the island nation of Cuba, located in the Caribbean to the south-east of Mexico, with its 11 million inhabitants, has been subject to severe US sanctions. All sectors of the Cuban economy are affected.

Furthermore, since February 2026, the US under President Donald Trump has been threatening to impose high tariffs on all countries that supply Cuba with crude oil or derivatives – a further tightening of sanctions aimed at regime change was introduced on 2 May this year.

For 33 years, the overwhelming majority of UN member states have voted to end the US embargo against Cuba. However, the US has ignored these resolutions. – The author has visited the island nation.

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I travelled to Cuba this month. As a Cuban American, that sentence carries the weight of longing born of an estrangement from my roots. For much of my life, Cuba existed as a distant story, a place I knew only through descriptions from my father.

I was there as part of an international solidarity convoy; over 500 representatives from more than 30 countries, united by a simple conviction: no country has the right to strangle another simply because it chose a different path. I cannot stand by while the island of my family's heritage is suffocated.

What I witnessed over those days was not the Cuba of Western propaganda. It was a country enduring a 66-year siege, and a people who, against all odds, continue to build, create, and care for one another.

A Public Health System Under Siege

One of the most profound visits was to a neighbourhood polyclinic in Havana. These clinics are

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Farmers' market in Havana. (Picture co)

the backbone of Cuba's public health system. Doctors live on the second floor, above where they work. They know every patient in their community by name. They treat physical and psychological health alike, and they embody a model of care that prioritizes people over profit.

But the doctors I met face heartbreaking constraints. They are highly trained professionals who know exactly what their patients need, and they know those treatments exist. Due to the U.S. embargo, they cannot access them. Imagine living every day with the skill to heal and being blocked by a political and economic siege.

We brought what we could: 6,300 pounds of medical supplies delivered by our delegation, including neonatal equipment, analgesics, catheters, and other critical materials, valued at \$433,000 and more still in unquantifiable amounts stuffed into carry-on and personal bags, sacrificing space for our own clothing and toiletries. Cuban doctors told us about nights when the power goes out, and medical students rush to respirators, manually pumping air for hours until electricity is restored. They save lives with their bare hands.

Community and Creativity in the Face of Scarcity

Everywhere we went, I saw people organizing to survive. In a central Havana neighbourhood, we

helped refurbish a crumbling playground. We brought paint and new swings. A local man who maintains the park offered to take the swings down each night so they wouldn't be taken, then put them back up each morning for the children. That kind of mutual care was everywhere.

We met an artist named Lázaro, who collects garbage and old newspapers to create recycled art. He teaches neighbourhood kids to do the same. His studio walls are covered in vibrant works that double as expressions of resistance and creativity.

On another day, we set up a table outside Lázaro's studio with construction paper, markers, and glue. Children from the neighbourhood gathered to write letters to pen pals in Singapore. I translated letters from English to Spanish, helping each child respond in Spanish and illustrate their replies. Parents played drums and danced while the kids painted and wrote. It was a profound moment of cross-border connection—kids building relationships through art and translation, across continents, across the blockade.

For Cuban Americans, there is something like a spiritual cost that is paid for quietly going along with the status quo in the face of the many injustices we have grown up with for decades, which seem to us to have intensified in these recent years. But the children I saw in Havana had their spirit intact.

The Human Cost of the Embargo

The blockade is not an abstraction. Poverty is real. I gave what I could, but as individuals, we cannot meet that scale of need brought upon by a systemic crisis created by U.S. policy.

Rolling blackouts on the island are the result of a strategy of siege warfare intensified in



Construction site in Old Havana. (Picture ma)



Tobacco farmers in Viñales, Pinar del Río. (Picture co)

January. Cuba has gone months without fuel imports due to sanctions and naval pressure aimed at stopping oil shipments to the island. Power plants cannot run consistently. Hospitals cannot perform necessary surgeries. Water pumping infrastructure fails. This is not a natural disaster. It is man-made violence; it is a silent war.

And yet, the Cuban people do not wait for rescue. They organize. They adapt. They invent.

Solidarity and a Call to Action

As a Cuban American, I have heard all my life that Cuba is a country ruled by capricious autocrats. That the Cuban people are waiting to be liberated. That their strangulation is meant to help them. But standing on that island, talking to doctors and artists and children and families, I saw something else entirely. I saw a people who are already free—free to define their own destiny, even under the weight of a siege designed to break them.

Cuba is open to dialogue and investment with respect for its sovereignty. But the U.S. continues to enforce a policy that even much of the world condemns. Year after year, the United Nations General Assembly votes overwhelmingly to end the embargo. Year after year, the U.S. ignores it.

I came back with a deeper sense of what solidarity looks like: showing up, listening, sharing what we can, and staying connected to the work. But solidarity cannot end after a single delegation. We need to break the siege. We need to end this decades-long economic warfare.

Cubans have a right to self-governance. They have a right to medicine, to electricity, to water, to dignity. My father chose to leave Cuba in the face of poverty brought on by a cruel sanction's regime. I chose to return for the same reason.

Let Cuba live.

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