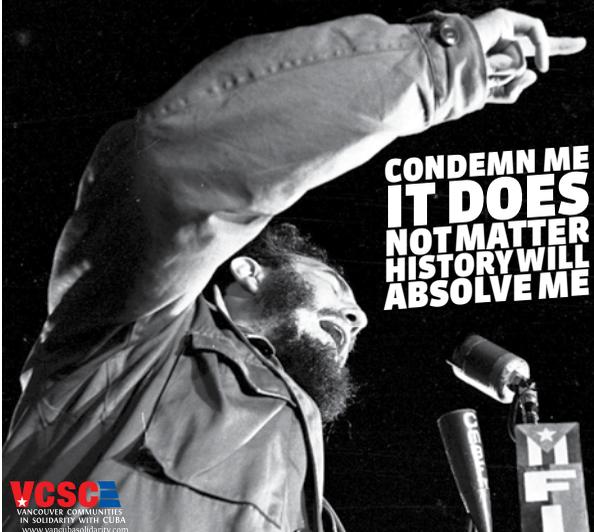


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**Summer 2016**  
2nd Edition



**JORNADA CUBANA  
CONTRA  
LA HOMOFobia**

**“My first major challenge was to be able to tell my son that I am a lesbian woman”**



By Tamara Hansen

On June 11, 2016 I was invited to a meeting in Seattle, Washington, USA to meet Isel Calzadilla Acosta, a Cuban lesbian activist and coordinator of the group “Las Isabelas” in Santiago de Cuba. The Seattle event was organized by the US-Women and Cuba Collaboration who gave me the honour of acting as Isel’s translator for the event. Over 40 people gathered to hear Isel speak about her experiences as woman and LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans\*) activist in Cuba. After a successful and inspiring meeting, I

**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
ISEL CALZADILLA ACOSTA,  
A LESBIAN ACTIVIST FROM CUBA &  
COORDINATOR OF LAS ISABELAS**

had the chance to sit down with Isel and ask her some more in-depth questions. Below is an interview originally printed in the Fire This Time Newspaper.

**Tamara Hansen:** On behalf of Fire This Time, our newspaper, thanks for talking with us. Please, tell us a little more about your organization, “Las Isabelas” and how it was formed.

**Isel Calzadilla:** Well my name is Isel Calzadilla, I am the coordinator of the first group of lesbian women in Cuba founded in 2000, but officially in 2003, when we asked for the advice and support of CENESEX, the “National Center for Sex Education” [in Cuba]. Since then we used that date as the foundation of the group.

The name “Las Isabelas” was chosen because of a place in Santiago de Cuba where all of the groups and people in

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# VANCOUVER WELCOMES CUBAN 5 HERO GERARDO HERNÁNDEZ!



By Noah Fine

When the decorations were set and doors opened to the conference hall of the Vancouver Public Library, more than two hundred and fifty people made their way in to hear from Cuban revolutionary hero and former Cuban 5 political prisoner Gerardo Hernandez.

The packed room was filled with energy and anticipation as participants walked through an exhibit of artwork made by Cuban 5 hero Gerardo Hernandez while he spent more than 16 years unjustly held in U.S. prison.

Tamara Hansen, coordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) opened the evening as the MC, welcoming everyone and explaining what an honour it is for Vancouver to receive a visit from Javier Domokos, Cuban Consul General in Toronto and one of our 5 Cuban heroes, Gerardo Hernandez.

She then got the program started by inviting to the stage Coast Salish indigenous elder, Kelly White who sang the Women's Warrior Song before performing an aboriginal blanketing ceremony to welcome Gerardo to the unceded Coast Salish Territory.

Other warm greetings were presented by Bob Chamberlin, elected Chief

Councillor of the Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation & Vice President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) as well as a cultural interlude in the program as 3 Poets from Proyecto Cultural Sur, Lucy Ortiz, Alejandro Mujica-Olea and Frida Marzolina read poems dedicated to the Cuban 5 and other social justice struggles. Many organizations were involved in helping to organize and support Gerardo's talk in Vancouver. These groups were given the opportunity to give greetings ahead of the main event including: ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War & End Racism) – Seattle, Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), Communist League, Fire This Time Newspaper, U.S. Women & Cuba Collaboration in Seattle, LELO - Legacy of Equality, Leadership & Organizing in Seattle, Richmond-Centre Federal New Democratic Party (NDP) & Friends of Cuba Against the U.S. Blockade – Vancouver.

A very special and warm greeting was given by long-time supporter of Cuba and the Cuban 5, lawyer and former Vancouver City Counselor, Tim Louis. Tim spoke about the inspiration he felt from the 5 Cuban Heroes to fight on in the struggle for a better world. Wilfredo Perez Bianco, Venezuelan Consul General in Vancouver spoke about the importance of the Cuban 5 heroes for the people of Venezuela, Cuba's sister nation which since the beginning of its' revolution has defended Cuba against U.S. hostility especially in the case of the 5 Cuban Heroes.

Gerardo's speech brought all of the more than 250 participants to their feet with huge emotion, applause and chants of "Viva los 5!" and "Viva Cuba!" Gerardo told stories of his time in prison and told how he was encouraged daily to continue the struggle for his freedom as he surrounded himself with photos of the international campaign, especially in Vancouver, demanding his freedom. Tamara closed the event inviting everyone to get involved in Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) and the campaign to end the U.S. blockade against Cuba and return Guantanamo Bay to Cuba, two of the main highlights from Gerardo's talk to Vancouver participants.

Gerardo made his difficult passage through the crowd at the event as supporters surrounded him trying to take photos and have their artwork signed. It was an emotional evening for all those who participated, especially after the great effort and campaign of many Vancouverites who joined some or all of the Free the Cuban 5 Committee-Vancouver's 110 monthly protests until the 5 Cuban Heroes were freed.

While in BC, Gerardo also had the opportunity to speak with labour unions as well as news media and at another very successful public event in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island.

Gerardo Hernandez' visit to Vancouver was a part of a cross Canada Tour. Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba would like to thank the United Steelworkers' Union for making his visit a reality. We also extend our thanks to the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa and Cuban Consulate in Toronto for their support.



# In Defense of Cuba!

Cuba solidarity activists in Vancouver, Canada and Seattle, USA demand "Lift the US Blockade on Cuba!"

By Janine Solanki

*On December 17, 2014, US President Obama made a historic announcement, that "the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba." A year and a half later, are Cuba solidarity groups done protesting the blockade? Not at all! While there are more exceptions and an easing of some restrictions, the US trade and travel blockade on Cuba is still in place. The US is still occupying the Cuban territory of Guantanamo Bay, and the US government still funds and directs covert regime change programs in Cuba.*

*For over 50 years Cuba and supporters around the world have been demanding an end to the blockade. Finally, we are seeing progress! In July 2015 Cuba and the US opened embassies once again in each others countries. In March 2016 Obama and a large US delegation visited Cuba. Now that positive moves are happening, public pressure is necessary to keep this progress moving forward. Increasing that pressure on is exactly what Cuba solidarity activists in Seattle, US and Vancouver, Canada are working together to do.*

## Seattle Stands with Cuba!

On June 11th, 2016 the US Women and Cuba Collaboration organized a public event in Seattle, Washington with special Cuban guest Isel Calzadilla Acosta. Isel is a Cuban activist and founder of "Las Isabelas" in association with Cuba's National Center for the Education of Sex (CENESEX). This event was a great chance for both people in the US and Cuba solidarity activists who drove down from Vancouver, Canada to join in hearing first-hand about the great gains Cuba is making for LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Trans) rights. There were many questions from the audience and a very fruitful exchange between participants and Isel. (Read the FTT interview with Isel on page 24).

It is definitely important to pressure the US government to lift the blockade from here in Canada. But Canada's Cuba solidarity must extend across the border to the US, which is the front lines of the Cuba solidarity movement. Exchange and cooperation between US and Canadian Cuba solidarity organizations is how we can unite forces for a stronger show of support for Cuba. That strength of solidarity was felt at the Seattle event with activists from Vancouver and Seattle sharing aspirations to end the blockade and a deep love for Cuba!

## Vancouver Pickets for Cuba!

On June 17, 2016 the Friends of Cuba Against the US Blockade – Vancouver (FCAB-Van) held their monthly picket action in front of the US Consulate in Vancouver,

demanding that the US lift the blockade on Cuba and return Guantanamo Bay to Cuba. The pickets happen on the 17th of every month, marking the day of Obama's historic announcement and will continue until the blockade is fully lifted! Local activists spoke between rounds of picketing and chanting, as well as a phone message of solidarity was shared from Ottawa



Vancouver, monthly picket against the U.S. blockade. June 17, 2016

of Ottawa Cuba Connections, who hold coordinated pickets at the US embassy in Ottawa.

## Che's Legacy Lives On

Following the June 17th picket against the US blockade, that evening Cuba supporters gathered for an event celebrating Che Guevara's 88th birthday. The event, organized by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC), honored the life and legacy of this revolutionary hero. Participants sang along to live music from MX Katracho, watched a film about Che Guevara, and even got to play a game of trivia to test their knowledge of Che Guevara's life!

## Out On the Streets

On June 19th Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba and Friends of Cuba

Against the US Blockade – Vancouver spent the day at the Car Free Festival, on Vancouver's Commercial Drive and Main Street. Activists at the Cuba solidarity information tables welcomed people who were especially curious to know more about the current state of US-Cuba relations. When passerby's found out that the US blockade on Cuba is in fact still in effect, they were eager to sign the petition demanding that the US end it's blockade on Cuba.

## Join in the Cuba Solidarity Movement!

There are many events and actions like these which you can join in to learn more about Cuba and protest the US blockade! Check out [www.vancubasolidarity.com](http://www.vancubasolidarity.com) and [www.vancouverblockade.org](http://www.vancouverblockade.org), find us on facebook, or on twitter

@VanCuba\_VCSC or @NoBloqueoVan

## We Cannot Remain Indifferent To Disturbances Resulting From The Imperialist Counteroffensive

The following is an excerpt from the speech by President of Cuba, Raul Castro in the opening session on 7th ACS Summit, Havana, Cuba, June 4, 2016.

Distinguished Heads of State and/or Government, Distinguished delegates and guests,

We hope one day to be able to count with the adherence of all of the Caribbean territories, including the sister island of Puerto Rico, as an independent and sovereign nation. Another issue demanding priority attention concerns sovereignty over our natural resources, which constitute a guarantee for the future and a source of wealth for our peoples. Allowing their unrestricted exploitation by foreign interests, with negligible profits for our nations, is tantamount to compromising development and adding to existing dependence.

We cannot remain indifferent to disturbances in Latin America and the Caribbean resulting from the imperialist and oligarchic counteroffensive unleashed against popular and progressive governments, which emerged after the failure of the neoliberal wave. This constitutes a threat to peace, stability, unity and indispensable regional integration.

The situation demands the reinforcement of consultation and coordination mechanisms in conformity with the precepts contained in Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by the Heads of States and/or Government attending the 2nd Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (CELAC), held in Havana in January 2014. We should also urge others to respect those principles in their relations with our countries.

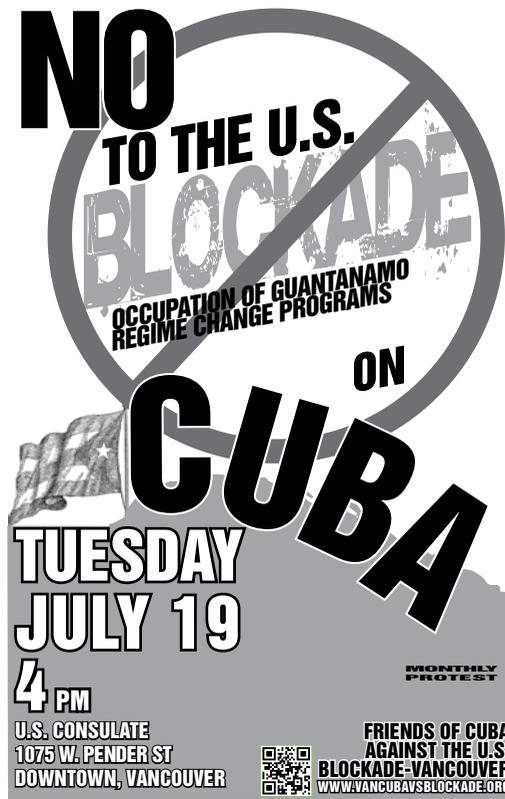
The commitments of States in the region to not interfere, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other State, and to abide by the principles of national sovereignty, equality of rights and the free determination of the peoples; to promote friendly and cooperative relations between them, and with other nations; to exercise tolerance and live in peace; and, to fully respect every State's inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social and cultural system are unavoidable conditions to peace, harmony, development and the integration of our countries.

I reaffirm our strongest and unconditional solidarity with the fraternal people of Venezuela, with the legitimate government of President Nicolas Maduro, and with the Bolivarian Revolution initiated by Commander Hugo Chavez Frias. They are firmly resisting the destabilizing thrust, and the economic and media warfare undertaken by those who intend to sweep away the political, economic and social conquests that have brought benefits to millions of people who for centuries lived in conditions of poverty, injustice and inequality.

It is a source of deep concern, the unacceptable attempt by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States [OAS] to apply the so-called Inter American Democratic Charter to interfere with the internal affairs of Venezuela. The statement published by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains Cuba's position and releases me of offering details.

I would only reiterate our view that the OAS, from its inception was, as it is and will continue to be, an instrument of imperialist domination, and no reform whatsoever can change its nature or its history. That is why Cuba will never return to the OAS.

We also extend our solidarity to the Brazilian people and their Constitutional President Dilma Rousseff, who is bravely confronting the parliamentary coup d'état promoted by the rightwing and neoliberal oligarchy, intent on reversing the social achievements scored during the governments headed by the Workers Party. I reaffirm our satisfaction with the progress attained in the Colombian peace process, and reiterate that we shall keep up the effort to contribute to achieve the completion of an agreement that can definitely put an end to the armed conflict in that sister nation.



Likewise, we are fully committed to support the reconstruction and development of the fraternal Republic of Haiti, the birthplace of the first revolution for independence and slave emancipation in Our America.

We shall never forget that when the ACS was established, in July 1994, our Caribbean brothers and sisters defended our membership in the bosom of this united family. At the time, Cuba was undergoing an extremely challenging situation, since our economy had fallen by 35%, due to the sudden loss of its major markets, in the aftermath of the demise of the European socialist camp and mounting imperialist pressures to corner and destroy the Revolution.

We shall neither forget the unrelenting support that every government represented here has provided to our just demand for the removal of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States; a blockade that remains in force, despite the fact that it has been rejected 24 times at the United Nations General Assembly, and other important, like the Summit of the Americas held in Panama last year; and despite positive but insufficient measures adopted by the current U.S. Administration.

We also appreciate the support displayed at the 4th CELAC Summit with respect to our demand for the return of the Cuban territory unlawfully occupied by a U.S. *Continued on 3*

*Continued from 6*

Naval Base in Guantanamo, against the will of our people and government.

Now, without further delay I pronounce the 7th Summit of the Association of Caribbean States open.

Thank you.

Reprinted from: [www.minrex.gob.cu](http://www.minrex.gob.cu)

*Continued from cover*

the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans\*) community get together. It is a cafeteria featuring traditional *Santiaguera* music, and is a meeting place called "La Isabelica". So we had a meeting with all the girls and decided on "Las Isabelas" because of this meeting place.

**TH: Great, thank you. So, what kind of work you do with your organization?**

**IC:** Our main work is aimed at lesbian and bisexual women over 18 and up to any age, there is no limit, we have no problem. Also, people who would like to help and give us any type of support are welcome to participate, whether heterosexual, gay or trans. Our work is aimed at improving our sexual health and to defend our rights in general. We work in the LGBT community and communities with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC - which is the organization that all of us Cuban women over 12 years old belong to in Cuba) and through this work we give more visibility to our group. We also participate with other groups that exist in Cuba in other provinces where we share our work. All of our groups count on the support of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), where we are given training in national workshops, where all of us women activists from different groups come together. Generally we select 10 ladies from each group and then they participate in these national workshops, which are taught by the best specialists in health and rights issues, and thus give

us the tools to work in activism.

**TH: As a lesbian woman in Cuba, what kind of achievements and challenges have you encountered throughout your life?**

**IC:** The main challenge was myself, because of the prejudices, taboos and upbringing we have in our country, we often keep ourselves completely in the closet. Then you move forward learning and knowing yourself and you come out of the closet. I have a son, now 22, and my first major challenge, the first thing that happened to me, was to be able to tell my son that I am a lesbian woman. As a child, he was raised by my mother, where there was a lot of homophobia and many things, but little by little I was teaching him that the world is very diverse, and gradually was showing him this other side. When he turned 15 he became a health promoter, so he was learning and understanding these issues. So the moment came when one day he asked me and I said, 'Look, yes, I am a woman who loves another woman,' and he already had very good relations my partner at that time, and so that was my first challenge.

Equally in the workplace, as people begin to imagine, when you know there are lots of parties and things, and you do not go with a *compañero* [a male friend/comrade]. No worries, my behavior has always been the best possible and with a lot of respect to me and to others. I've never had any problems with anyone, I have lived my life based on respect. I think that in this way people have also respected me.

Yes, many women with regards to the family, have many challenges being out of the closet in their family or at work. For many people, once you express your sexual orientation they will no longer treat you equally, because of prejudice and taboos. But we are gradually educating



*Mariela Castro, President of CENESEX & VCSC organizers, Havana May 2016*

the population to not think this way.

**TH: Good, can you tell us about the achievements of Las Isabelas and CENESEX to change this mindset in society?**

**IC:** Yes of course. When we started the group, Las Isabelas, I'm a nurse by profession, and many of us are professionals in different fields, and everyone has expressed the desire to know more, to learn more, to work and research on our own sexuality. If we do not do the research ourselves about lesbians, there is very little literature on this. So we have learned to do scientific research and to present the work in universities and scientific events. It has been one of our most important achievements, that several women in the group have already written scientific work on the subject of lesbian women.

Besides this, assuring that every person who is in the group is involved and integrated into society, either through study, work, courses, or workshops of any kind. Once you have become part of the group you learn many interesting and necessary things, such as the laws, which previously nobody knew about. Ignorance is what can allow your rights to be infringed Next Page



on. This has been one of our most important gains. Our infinite thanks to CENESEX! which has enabled us to learn about these issues, which help us to have a better life.

**TH: Outside the LGBT community in Cuba, do you have support from different organizations and networks?**

**IC:** First, we have the support of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) that supports us specifically as lesbians and bisexual women. We also have a network of lawyers, which has been one of the best networks that CENESEX ever took the initiative to form. We have a series of lawyers, legal minds, who support us and know the laws and can defend us when there are any cases of discrimination or violations of rights, it has been very important.

We also have a network that is supporting us a lot, which is the network of social workers for sexual rights. These people are mainly concerned with LGBT people who are living at home alone or without family, etc. this network is doing a good job



with respect to this. The network of for youth rights, which are university students and pre-university students, who have the knowledge or who want to learn about rights and are support us.

Also the different ministries for public health, who always support us, and psychologists, who are also always with us in our events and all the things we do. We also include people involved in cultural work through the different *peñas* [cultural groups] that exist, other artists that approach us as well. In the end, we are always obtaining more support.

Now we are also doing good work with women educators, because we are all women. Especially kindergartens, where they are showing a lot of interest in having us train them on these issues, because these women are educating boys and girls in children's centers, and we want to convey real knowledge about sexual diversity so that we do not continue handing down from generation to generation all the prejudice and taboos that we have been dragging around with us for a thousand years.

**TH: Do you have a message you want to bring here to the United States or to the readers of our newspaper in**

**Canada and around the world?**

**IC:** I mean, the most important thing is to give my eternal gratitude to the group of American women supporting the Cuban revolution, especially Moon and Cindy, [two leading organizers with US-Women and Cuba Collaboration] who have made my trip to the United States possible.

I should also say, to all who read your newspaper, please support us in putting an end to the U.S. blockade against Cuba, which is so damaging to all of the Cuban people, but especially to women. The blockade is one of the things that continues to damage us every day in our work and our lives.

**TH: What do you see for the future of the LGBT community in Cuba?**

**IC:** In Cuba I see a good future regarding these issues. The work we do as activists to defend our own rights, is moving forward little by little. Sometimes in slow steps, other times with speedy steps, but never stopping. I think in the future we will conquer more, much more space, much more momentum than we have now. Always with the support of the government, which we currently have. Our government supports us in everything we do. Also state institutions such as CENESEX, an agency of the Cuban government, which has opened doors for us, which has given us qualifications, helped us, medically, socially, and in many other ways. I think yes, we can move forward and we will continue with success.

**TH: Thank you Isel, for a very educational and interesting interview.**

*Reprinted from:  
www.firethistime.net*

## 2016 Che Guevara Brigade to Cuba a Huge Success! Participants Brought Back Great Experiences and Memories to Share!

*By Azza Rojbi*

The Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade has been an amazing opportunity for people living in Canada to travel to Cuba, immerse themselves in the Cuban reality and learn about its gains and achievements. Hundreds of people of various ages, abilities, skills and backgrounds have participated since 1993. The brigade is organized by the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) and the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).

26 participants from all across Canada joined this year 24 th Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade for two full weeks of adventure, volunteering, learning & fun! The Che brigade combines volunteer work with a cultural, social and political program visiting different historical sites, schools, clinics and yes, even the beach! The brigade visited the provinces of Artemisa, Cienfuegos and Villa Clara. The brigade arrived to Cuba on April 30th, and started its journey in the province of Artemisa. Brigadistas stayed at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp in Caimito. This camp was also host to 200 international delegates to the May Day International Solidarity Brigade. This created a great opportunity for brigadistas to connect and exchange with social justice and Cuba solidarity activists from around the world.

In the spirit of Ernesto Che Guevara, the Brigade took part in volunteer work at organic farm cooperatives (organopónico). We had the honor to work alongside representative from the the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas—FMC). We got to meet them, share anecdotes, ask questions and learn more about the gains and challenges



of Cuban Women since the revolution. Brigadistas were astonished to hear about the high level of participation of Cuban women in the political and economic life of the country. 49% of deputies to the Cuban National Assembly are women, while in the case of the Provincial Assemblies, women delegates comprise 50.5%.

The brigade program was very rich and diverse. We visited schools, cultural centers, museums, historical sights, hospitals and community projects. We also had the opportunity to meet with Cuban artists, representatives from Cuban mass organizations and from all levels of the Cuban Government, such as elected representatives of the National Assembly of People's Power. Those meetings and visits brought us a greater understanding of how a small island which has been under constant attack by the most aggressive country in the world for over 50 years, can still be an example for building the better world.

Another highlight of the trip was the visit to the Ernesto Che Guevara memorial center and mausoleum in Santa Clara. The mausoleum houses the remains of Che Guevara and 29 of his fellow co-

fighters killed in 1967 in Bolivia. The brigade honored his legacy by laying a wreath under the grand status of Che overseeing the memorial center. The visit was very powerful and emotional as brigadistas got to learn more about the life of Comandante Che Guevara and the ideals he stood and fought for.

The Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade is an incredible way to visit Cuba, to dig deeper into its fascinating culture, to learn about its social gains, to understand its challenges and to make an important contribution through your volunteer work. Next year will be the 25th anniversary of the brigade. It will be a unique opportunity for you to travel to Cuba and experience the Brigade for yourself. For more information about the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade, you can visit the website at [www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca/brigade](http://www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca/brigade), e-mail [chevolbrigade@gmail.com](mailto:chevolbrigade@gmail.com), or in British Columbia, you can also contact B.C. Coordinators Tamara Hansen and Thomas Davies at 778-882-5223 or [vancubasolidarity@gmail.com](mailto:vancubasolidarity@gmail.com)