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**Written statement* submitted by Centro de Estudios Sobre la Juventud (CESJ),
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 February 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

THE CUBAN YOUTH AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BLOCKADE

Since the victory of the Revolution in 1959, the United States began its siege against the Cuban people, which was later institutionalized with an economic, trade and financial blockade enacted on February 3, 1962 by President John F. Kennedy and tightened by the Bush Administration. To undermine the resistance of our people and the very existence of Cuba as sovereign and independent nation is the obsession of the current US Administration and the expression of its unconditional support to the Cuban-American mafia in Miami.

Although this policy of siege implemented against our country has affected the whole of the population, it is necessary to underline the damage it has inflicted on the youths, who are subject to significant anatomical and physiological changes; with needs, hopes, expectations and projects typical of this period of life, and not before or after.

Cuba started the 21st Century with 11,250,979 million inhabitants of which 43% ranges from 0 to 29 years of age and although one of the main features of the Cuban youth before the world, during the past 46 years, is that it has lived under historical conditions marked by the US blockade, with the exception of the generation of the 1990's who -following the victory of the Revolution – were the first whose childhood coincided with an unprecedented crisis created by, among other factors, the opportunistic harshening of the blockade. The youths began to show signs of doubt about the future, which in some was expressed as a marked effort to overcome difficulties while others disregarded existing norms.

The imbalance between expectations- particularly the material aspirations of youths– and the possibility to actually satisfy them gave rise to a series of changes both in their perception and daily performance. For example, although it is possible to state that youths' conceptualization of work continued to be positive since most either worked or were willing to work, their links to the workplace were conditioned by a number of external factors and not to the benefits they derived from their work such as social security benefits and the advantages granted by their profession.

Interest to continue their education was also affected since they did not consider that a university degree would provide economic benefits or resolve problems of this nature. Today, this situation has been reverted and it is possible to say that the aspirations of Cuban youths are guided by the importance of an education. There is a constant interest, undoubtedly brought about by the many possibilities offered by the new programs of the Revolution.

Another aspect that has had a decisive influence on youths is the little availability to a space of their own. It is necessary to underline that housing was a problem in Cuba even before the special period, which has become worse in recent years and is still unresolved due to the shortage and high cost of construction materials.

The shortages experienced by the population during these past years have deteriorated moral values related to consumer habits. Phenomena such as prostitution, which was minimal at the social level during the 1960s', re-emerged with force during the 1990's, especially among youths. Although this is a multi-causal problem, and consequently requires multiple analyses, most of those who practice it affirm that the economic factor had the greatest bearing on their decision.

The fact that there are youths in Cuba who engage in prostitution has been over dimensioned by the media and airline companies as part of a major international campaign to promote the island as a destination for sex tourism, which denigrates the image of Cuban youths, particularly women and also because – however ludicrous- it gives the United States President a pretext to disparage the Cuban government.

Another element of vital importance when analyzing the impact of the blockade on the young generations is that some are compelled to consider migrating as a possible alternative for satisfying their immediate needs. Those who resort to this option view the United States as the ideal destination. The problem is that emigration- particularly economic emigration that for many years has been the main reason for leaving the country- is hardly ever carried out in keeping with the migration accords subscribed between Cuba and the United States. On the contrary, in order to denigrate the Cuban Revolution, the media controlled by the Cuban-American mafia in Miami encourages these actions and in fact many youths have immigrated illegally, attracted by the benefits provided by the Cuban Adjustment Act.

Illegal immigration is one of the cruelest sequels of the US blockade since it has caused the death of many youths with the subsequent sorrow to their relatives. However, its real intention is to create anarchic migration movements that could justify a military aggression against Cuba.

One of the most severe attacks against Cuban children and youths is the impact of the blockade on education, which dramatically limits the availability of resources. There is not a single sector of the National Education System that has not been affected by the blockade. However, in the face of each new measure adopted by the empire, there is always a more energetic response that benefits the people as a whole. Undoubtedly, education is one of the many social achievements that the country exhibits with pride, since it is a bulwark in the endeavor to dignify man.

Another consequence of the blockade that mainly affects youths is the constraint on the quality and quantity of the food available- which also has a bearing on the food safety of youths and the population at large- in their attempts to triumph over our people by starving it to death, by causing material shortages and despair. Food has been used as a weapon and President Bush himself has spoken about the convenience of obstructing the sale of food and agricultural products in detriment to the interests of US farmers.

Art is another of our national activities affected by the blockade since tours, exhibitions, participation in recitals and competitions have been prevented, which has affected the personal realization of young Cuban artists. This is also applicable to athletes who are not allowed to take part in a number of sporting activities due to the hurdles imposed by US authorities.

Although the US government proclaimed Cuba's inclusion in the list of countries that promote and carry out terrorist actions and persists in its attempt to present the island as a threat to the national security of the United States, Cuban youths continue to be the victims of an increasing aggressive policy adopted by our neighbors in the north expressed in an aberrant system of economic sanctions and laws, armed aggressions and biological warfare.

Nevertheless, the policy expressed and materialized through the blockade has not been able to destroy the enthusiasm or the active resistance of the Cuban people. The will to resist has been and will continue to be the fundamental pillar, in the face of all the maneuvers and aggressions undertaken by the US government and its henchmen.

In spite of the adverse economic situation that our country is living through- which makes daily life difficult and violates the human rights of more than 11 million Cubans by the most powerful country in the world- the political will of the Cuban State and Government, backed by the unconditional support of civil society is to improve the quality of life of the people, particularly of its most prized treasure: its children, adolescents and youth.

Today, in spite of the strengthening of the blockade, Cuba exhibits more than 170 programs in the fields of education and culture, its principal line of action, addressed mainly at youths. To work for the attainment of a general comprehensive culture is more than a matter of raising our peoples' academic level. Due to the country's current conditions, the demand for greater expertise and culture for the purpose of exchanging views, cooperating and discussing with the rest of the world, is peremptory, particularly for opposing the economic and cultural pressures exerted against our country by its powerful neighbor of the north. We do not have the vast economic and promotional potential of the superpowers, however, our country has an immense human potential that requires both our care and attention.

Thus, Cuban society has been able to counter – to a certain extent- the damages that the blockade has inflicted on our youth policies, thus gradually creating the conditions that will ensure the social and educational integration of the new generations.

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