

Evolution of the LGBT issue in Cuba, which is to host international LGBT conference

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Cuba to host international LGBT conference for the first time ever

According to the Washington Blade [1], more than 400 people from across the world will travel to the communist country, for the sixth International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association for Latin America and the Caribbean (ILGALAC) Regional Conference.

Although homosexuality has been technically legal in Cuba since 1979, it was not until Raúl Castro took power from his brother in 2008 that the first gay rights marches were permitted, and there are still no discrimination laws, or recognition of same-sex couples.

Mariela Castro, the daughter of Cuban President Raúl Castro, was part of the committee that helped organize the conference, to be held in Varadero, just outside the capital Havana.

She has been a prominent supporter of gay rights in the past, openly praising Barack Obama for supporting same-sex marriage, and leading pro-gay protest marches.

A statement from IGLALAC said: "Cuba is not exempt from the problems of the region's LGBTI communities.

"Although the Cuban LGBTI movement does not have the organization of other international movements, the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the country is now evident with more impact and achievements."

MassEquality board member Robyn Ochs noted the conference would be the first time she had set foot in Cuba, saying: "I've long been interested in transnational conversations. I hope to learn a great deal."

However, some Americans have criticised the decision to hold the event in Cuba, given long-standing diplomatic rifts.

US congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said: "Hosting a conference on LGBT rights is just another farcical attempt by the Cuban regime to pretend they care about anyone's rights.

"The sad reality is that the Cuban people are harassed, beaten and bullied for having a point of view that differs from the regime's.

"This desperate move to seem tolerant does not even come close to obscuring the repressive reality on the island."

Nick Duffy

* Pink News, 4th May 2014, 8:02 PM:

http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/05/04/cuba-to-host-international-lgbt-conference-for-the-first-time-ever/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Pinknews+%28Pink+News%29&utm_content=FeedBurner

Cuba: Hundreds protest against homophobia in Havana

Hundreds took to the streets of Cuban capital Havana, in favour of LGBT rights and against homophobia, at the weekend, led by gay rights campaigner Mariela Castro.

The march followed the central streets of the city, and was led by Mariela, niece of Fidel Castro, and daughter of Cuban President Raul Castro. She is the head of Cuba's National Sexual education Centre, which organised the march.

The demonstrators formed a long conga-dance line, carried rainbow banners and chanted: "Homophobia, no! Socialism, yes!", reports the BBC.

Castro said she was optimistic that Cuba would eventually legalise equal marriage, however she said the first step was tackling prejudice in the country.

The country made being gay legal in 1979 and has a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. Before Raul Castro came to power back in 2008, no gay rights marches had been permitted in the country.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, gay people in Cuba were fired, imprisoned and sent to "re-education camps".

Castro, was last month given the go-ahead to attend an LGBT conference in the US, where she will receive an award for her contributions to gay rights, after initially being barred from travelling within the US [2].

Slow moves towards equal marriage are taking place in South America, as Uruguay recently became the 12th country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage, which was signed into law by President Jose Mujica last week [3]. Uruguay's neighbour Argentina legalised equal marriage in 2010 [4].

Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro has said that he was responsible for Cuba persecuting gay men in the 1960s and 70s, and that after the revolution in 1959, gay and lesbian people were persecuted.

The former president told Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* that there had been moments of "great injustice" against the gay community [See below].

Joseph Patrick McCormick

* Pnk News. 13th May 2013, 3:12 PM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/05/13/cuba-hundreds-protest-against-homophobia-in-havana/>

Cuba: President's daughter praises Barack Obama's support for equal marriage

The daughter of Cuba's president praised US president Barack Obama yesterday after he came out in support of equal marriage rights for gay couples.

Mariela Castro, a prominent gay rights activist in the island nation and niece of Fidel Castro, said she hoped Mr Obama's announcement, making him the first sitting president of the US to support marriage equality, would have legislative repercussions around the world.

According to AP, in her role as head of the National Center for Sex Education, Cenesex, she said the president's position was "humane, understanding, in which he even recognizes that he too has been changing his opinion in favor of marriage, the free union of same-sex couples."

"Hopefully his words will be taken seriously in the political and legislative decisions made in different states and in the whole world."

Under Fidel Castro many gay men suffered in Cuban labour camps as the regime 're-educated' homosexuals, with homosexuality being seen as a symptom of corruption by capitalism.

Gays were incarcerated in Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPs) between 1965 and 1968.

Castro believed that hard work would rid the men of their "counter-revolutionary tendencies."

In 2010, Fidel Castro took responsibility saying if anyone were culpable it would have been him and that the persecution of gays was "a great injustice" [See below].

Stephen Gray

* Pink News. 11th May 2012, 10:13 AM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2012/05/11/cuba-presidents-daughter-praises-barack-obamas-support-for-equal-marriage/>

Castro takes responsibility for Cuba persecuting gays

Fidel Castro has said that he was responsible for Cuba persecuting gay men in the 1960s and 70s.

The former president told Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* that there had been moments of "great

injustice” against the gay community.
“If someone is responsible, it’s me,” he said.

He added that he did not have any personal prejudice against gays and lesbians but was trying to work out how responsible he was for the persecution.

Castro was leader of Cuba from 1959 to 2009 and believed that sexual diversity was a corrupt consequence of capitalism.

During his rule, many gay men suffered in Cuban labour camps as the regime ‘re-educated’ homosexuals to rid them of their “counter-revolutionary tendencies”.

Castro added that he had not paid enough attention to the issue of homophobia, saying: “At the time we were being sabotaged systematically, there were armed attacks against us, we had too many problems.”

Homosexual sex was partially decriminalised in Cuba in 1979 and an equal age of consent was introduced in 1992.

In the last few years, Mariela Castro, the niece of the former president and the daughter of his successor, Raul Castro, has become a campaigner for LGBT rights.

Ms Castro, the head of Cuba’s National Centre for Sex Education, has been a strong supporter of legal moves to grant equal rights to all citizens, including steps towards same-sex unions and access to gender reassignment surgery.

Jessica Geen

* Pink News. 1st September 2010, 10:23 AM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2010/09/01/castro-takes-responsibility-for-cuba-persecuting-gays/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/05/02/cuba-host-international-lgbt-conference/>

[2] <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/04/30/raul-castros-daughter-granted-travel-rights-to-attend-lgbt-conference/>

[3] <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/05/09/uruguay-president-mujica-signs-equal-marriage-into-law/>

[4] <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2010/07/15/argentina-becomes-first-country-in-latin-america-to-legalise-gay-marriage/>