

Office of
ISIAH TURNER
City Manager



February 15, 2000

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Irma L. Anderson,
Members of the Official Richmond Friendship City Delegation and
Richmond Cuba Friendship Committee

Re: **Report on Official Visit to Regla, Cuba**

I am pleased to submit the following report on the first official visit from Richmond to our Friendship City in Regla, Cuba from December 9 - December 19, 1999. The report will describe the purpose of the visit, the delegates, itinerary, accomplishments, impressions and next steps.

Purpose

The purpose of the official visit was to fulfill the promise of the City Council's resolution No. 147-99 to establish a Friendship City relationship between Richmond, California and Regla, Cuba for the exchange of mutually beneficial ideas and the sharing of cultural, educational, humanitarian and municipal resources.

Per the resolution the official Richmond visit to Regla was humanitarian in nature in order to promote the exchange of citizen delegations, and medical, educational, cultural and municipal resources.

Delegation Members

The official Richmond delegation consisted of 22 members who sought to meet Cuban counterparts in the fields of government, health care, sports medicine, education, environment, labor, telecommunications, solid waste management, Port management, land management and more.

Eight officials from Richmond participated including: Irma L. Anderson, Councilmember and delegation leader; Bobbie Arnold, Assistant to the Mayor; Joan Kubota, Police Investigative and Appeals Officer; Linda Harris, Senior Administrative Analyst and project coordinator; Trina

Jackson, Aide to the City Council and assistant project coordinator; Anna A. Vega, Finance Director and translator; Sharon Woods, Harbormaster; Tarnel Abbott, Children's librarian.

The delegation also included Micheal Davenport of DP Securities who also represented the Anti-Drug Task Force.

A comprehensive list of delegates and their affiliations is attached.

Itinerary

Closely matching the professional interests of the 22 delegates, the itinerary included visits to government offices, schools and universities, clinics and hospitals, utility companies, sports facilities, historic sites and museums and more.

Impressions & Highlights

Delegation members were honored to receive special permission from the United States Department of the Treasury to visit our Friendship City in Cuba. Our impressions were many; highlights included:

1. Rare chance to visit Cuba as part of an official government delegation. Not many Americans are afforded the opportunity to visit Cuba with a government license.
2. Appreciation of Richmond's humanitarian gesture. The delegation was warmly welcomed by Cubans everywhere. Cubans understood how difficult it was for an American municipality to establish a Friendship City much less send a delegation.
3. Ability of Cubans to distinguish between the American people and the American government. Surprisingly, Cuban embrace the American people despite the blockade imposed by U.S. government.
4. Meeting counterparts in Regla and Havana. Not only did the delegation meet the Mayor and officials in Regla, but we met with high ranking officials in the national government, including the Governor of Havana, Coordinator of the Cuban National Assembly, and Minister of Foreign Affairs.
5. Frank discussions about daily life in Cuba. Delegates were invited by Cubans at all levels to discuss all aspects of daily life in Cuba from the blockade, resulting economic struggle, the future of politics post-Castro, race relations, etc.
6. Mutual commitment to enhance Friendship City relationship. Delegation leader Irma Anderson brought a framed copy of Richmond's resolution to government officials in Regla. Regla officials reciprocated by translating the tenets of the resolution into a contract which was signed by both cities in a formal ceremony at the headquarters of the People's Provincial Assembly in Havana.

7. Local and national exposure. News of the delegation's official visit was broadcast on local and national news in Cuba. Delegation leader Irma Anderson was interviewed by the print and broadcast media.
8. Donation of resources. Delegates brought donations from the United States including over \$25,000 in medical supplies to health care facilities in Regla and Havana; nearly \$2,000 in cosmetics and toiletries to professional women and athletes; and more than one dozen children's books worth over \$150 for elementary school children and the local public library in Regla.
9. Success of Cuban government. Delegates witnessed firsthand the success of the Cuban government to provide *health care* in hospitals and local clinics where doctors and nurses live on-site; to ensure access to *education* such that literacy reaches 98% and every Cuban can go to college gratis; and to commit to excellence in *sports*, including state-of-the-art Olympic training facilities.
10. Richness in human resources. Delegates were impressed by the richness of human spirit in Cuba where the people and government unite to make the best of scarce resources for the betterment of all. Billboards touted "Nothing is More Important than a Child." There appeared to be no homelessness in the streets. Health care and education are the priorities:

As the Mayor of Regla said, "First we take care of the people's well-being, our body and our mind. Later material well-being will follow."

Accomplishments

As a result of the official visit, delegates accomplished the following:

1. Exchange of Citizen Delegations

Sending a delegation to Cuba was one of many accomplishments. The delegates were warmly received in Regla by local officials.

The visit to Regla included:

- Tour of the City Hall
- Presentation of the City of Richmond resolution and gifts to the Mayor
- Description of Regla's history and local customs
- Visit to an elementary school and "career club"
- Tour of local medical clinic and hospital
- Visit to Regla's port
- Glimpses of Regla's oil refinery and other industries
- Homage to Regla's patron saint, the Black Virgin
- Invitation to a dance recital at the local cultural center

2. Exchange of Municipal Resources

The commitment to exchange municipal resources was visible in many ways, including:

- Presentation at the Regla City Hall by delegation leader Irma Anderson to the Mayor of Regla with a framed copy of the City of Richmond's Friendship City resolution
- Translation by the Mayor of Regla of the tenets of the resolution into an agreement in both English and Spanish.
- Signing of the agreement in a formal ceremony at the headquarters of the People's Provincial Assembly in Havana.
- Broadcast of the signing in print, radio and television media throughout Cuba.
- Joint meeting of Richmond delegates and high-ranking officials in the national Cuban government to discuss similarities and differences in daily life between the two cities.
- Demonstration of sports training techniques at the National Institute of Sports and Physical Recreation (INDER) where Cuban athletes train for the Olympics, among other activities.
- Visit to La Presencia de Lenin, a group facility for homeless youth where the youth to staff ratio is one staff to one youth.

3. Exchange of Medical Resources

The delegation brought donations of medical supplies and other items to bring relief to the Cubans whose access to even the most basic medical goods is severely limited. For example, even aspirin is luxury to most Cubans.

In return the Cubans showed the delegation a national system of comprehensive health care that is both accessible to and accepted by its citizens.

Through the coordination of Ian Ahwah, M.D. and Richard Turner, M.D., examples of the medical donations included:

- Procurement and donation of over \$25,000 in medical supplies, including 15,000 tablets of aspirin, and front line, newer generation antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and pain medications.
- Procurement and donation of 3,000 condoms and accompanying instructions in Spanish through the City's Anti-Drug Task Force and Contra Costa County Department of Health.
- Procurement and donation of medical equipment such as breathing tubes, stethoscopes and books to the Latin American School of Medicine.

- Procurement and donation of 50 pairs of eyeglasses
- Visits to local clinics and hospitals in Regla and Havana for first-hand view of national community-based health care system
- Visit to the Latin American School of Medicine which trains medical personnel for service throughout Cuba and Latin America.
- Interview with sports medicine specialists at the National Institute of Sports and Physical Recreation (INDER) where Cuban athletes train for the Olympics, among other activities.

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In addition to medical supplies, delegates were asked to bring personal gifts to share with Cuban counterparts such as cosmetics and toiletries. Items such as soap and lipstick are cherished because they are hard to acquire, yet enhance self-esteem.

Through the coordination of Sharon Woods, Richmond Harbormaster, donations of cosmetics included:

- Gift packages of Mary Kay lipstick, blush, eye shadow and nail polish to over 100 women in Regla and Havana.
- Worth approximately \$1,800 the gift packages were procured through the generous donations of the Independent Beauty Consultants in the Fremont Training Center.
- Complimentary make-over to Anna Fidelia Quirot, a world-class athlete and Olympic champion who had recovered from severe burns all over her body.

4. Exchange of Educational Resources

The Cuban government prizes education. Investment in education has yielded a literacy rate of 98%. Every Cuban has the chance to go to college and tuition is free.

Bringing relief to Cubans whose access to new books, pens and paper is severely limited, the delegation brought donations of educational resources and other items.

Through the coordination of Tarnel Abbot, Richmond Children's Librarian donations of educational resources included:

- 15 books valued at over \$150 given to the elementary school in Regla, the Regla public library, the Proyecto Orunmila Anthropological Research Group in Regla and the Presencia de Lenin orphanage in Havana. A copy of the list is attached.
- Donations to Cuba were made possible by personal contributions of Tarnel Abbot and colleagues at the Richmond Public Library.
- Other donations were courtesy of the Association of Children's Librarians of Northern California (ACL).
- Visits to primary school and youth career club in Regla for first-hand view of educational system.
- Visit to the Universidad de Habana home to the Schools of Law, Math, Humanities, Sociology, Cybernetics, Educations, etc.
- Visit to the Latin American School of Medicine which trains medical personnel for service throughout Cuba and Latin America.
- Interview with historian Dr. Delio J. Carreras Cuevas and scholar Dr. Antonio Iglesias

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To further the education of the delegates and interested Richmond community members, the delegation supported Jacques Bronson, film maker with Athletes United for Peace, in his efforts to produce a video documentary of the visit.

Thus, the education exchange will produce the following:

- Professional documentation of the official Richmond delegation visit.

5. Exchange of Cultural Resources

The delegation was exposed to many cultural aspects of life in Regla and Havana including:

- Traditional dance and music performance at the cultural center in Regla
- Visit to the Anthropology Museum in Regla
- Homage to the Black Virgin, nationally renown patron saint of Regla
- Presentation by Proyecto Orunmila Research on Preserving African Cultural Heritage
- Purchase of art and handicrafts at galleries and street fairs

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Augmenting scarce resources, the delegation made the following donation:

- Hewlett-Packard printer cartridge to the Proyecto Orunmila Research Center with a value of approximately \$150 enabling the staff to publish and distribute hundreds of reports for the benefit of Regla residents and academics.

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In addition, the delegation received information on the significant Chinese population which first entered Cuba through the Port of Regla. The visit included:

- Visit to Chinatown in Havana, where there is significant redevelopment activity
- Visit to 98 year-old Chinese immigrant now living in a home for the elderly sponsored by the Cuban government
- Participation in "Chinese Diaspora in Latin American & the Caribbean," an international conference

6. Exchange of Other Resources

Apart from the exchange of citizen, municipal, educational and cultural resources, the delegation received valuable information regarding other aspects of urban life in Cuba:

- Land Use Planning: Visit to life-size model of Havana, for view of community planning
- Solid Waste Management: Visit to comprehensive recycling facility
- Economic Development: Tour of newly restored Old Havana; visit to Matanzas for view of beach resort industry; tour of cigar factory and tobacco fields
- Environment: Tours of metropolitan park system and urban river restoration projects

Next Steps

As a follow-up to the official visit to Regla and to continue the mission of the Richmond Cuba Friendship Committee, the delegation presents the following next steps:

1. Municipal Exchange
 - Raise funds to facilitate official visit of Regla officials to Richmond
 - Continue collaboration with U.S. Cuban Sister Cities Association

2. Citizen Exchange
 - Collaborate with Athletes United for Peace to bring Richmond athletes to Cuba in April 2000

3. Medical Exchange
 - Continue procurement and donation of medical supplies
 - Sponsor eye glasses drive at City Hall

4. Education Exchange
 - Complete production of Richmond/Regla Video”
 - Increase awareness of the Friendship City relationship by sharing information at local schools, businesses and community groups
 - Sponsor book and school supply drives

5. Cultural Exchange
 - Organize fundraiser in form of salsa concert and/or festival
 - Collaborate with Art Commission for art exchange and/or exhibition

6. Other Exchange
 - Support the Trust for Public Land in plans for urban conservation exchange

Summary

In summary the delegation had a very insightful experience in Cuba. Given the nature of the exchanges between Richmond and the Regla, the mission was accomplished to create a people-to-people relationship with humanitarian purposes.

Because of the dialogue and sharing regarding citizen, municipal, medical, educational, cultural and other resources, Richmond and Regla have created a solid foundation upon which a thriving Friendship city relationship can grow

In conclusion, the official Richmond delegation visit was a success.

Acknowledgments

The trip was made possible through the successful collaboration of City officials working in tandem with members of the Richmond Cuba Friendship Committee, local business leaders, health care representatives and high-ranking diplomats from the United States and Cuban governments.

Special acknowledgment is made to Congressman George Miller and his California District Chief David Tucker along with Richmond's Washington representative Dick Kochan. These individuals worked with City staff to secure the Cuba entry license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Special acknowledgment is also made to Felix Wilson, Deputy Minister of the Cuban Interests Section, Julio Espinosa, Coordinator General of the Cuban National Assembly and Alex Lopez, specially licensed travel agent for official U.S. missions to Cuba.

Lastly, to all the delegates, their family, Bay Area supporters, and Cuban friends, many thanks for your generous and thoughtful contributions.

Enclosures

List of Delegates