

Costa Rica hosted a Week of Democracy on the occasion of the Summit for Democracy 2023 with Commissioner Urpilainen delivering on 30 March a video message during the main event on promoting the role of youth in politics and democracy.

Costa Rica hosted RightsCon, ‘the world’s largest event on human rights in the digital age’, in June 2023 in San José.

At various occasions, Costa Rica joined statements with other founders of the Alliance for Development of Democracy (ADD) (Panama and the Dominican Republic) on different topics, such as requesting respect of democratic institutions in Ecuador in May or in Guatemala in December 2023.

Republic of Cuba

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Despite some advances, the situation of human rights in Cuba remained a matter of serious concern in 2023 given the persisting limitations on the effective exercise of some fundamental rights and freedoms - in particular, civil and political rights, including freedoms of expression, association, assembly, movement and information. The deep economic crisis has also impacted economic and social rights, and continues to fuel massive migration outflows. The US embargo and the maintenance of Cuba in the list of States Sponsors of Terrorism continued having a considerable impact, including on the standards of living of the population and on the much-needed modernization, comprising the emergent private sector. Restrictions to activities of local HRDs, journalists, academics, artists and critical voices constrain pluralism. Disproportionate prison sentences to peaceful protesters and pro-democracy activists (notably those involved in July 2021 events, still under detention), poor conditions in detention centres, reports of alleged harassment, arbitrary arrests, and travel-restrictions, remain challenges the authorities should address. Cuba is a one-party State and organised political opposition is not legal. Even though it has not been applied since 2003, the Cuban Criminal Code still retains the death penalty. Despite introducing some advances, this Code could be potentially used to further prevent citizens from expressing their dissent and to criminalise international funding of artists, journalists and activists, in particular those using social media.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2023, the EU remained engaged in monitoring the situation and maintaining a constant critical but constructive dialogue with authorities on human rights defenders, under the umbrella of the key legal instrument at our disposal - the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA). In particular, HRDs were discussed at the highest political level in the context of the EU HRVP mission to Havana for the Joint Council. The parties publically agreed to pursue cooperation in concrete actions in a number of areas pertaining to HR.

A special focus was given to supporting the implementation of international law and the promotion of good governance, civil, political, economic, social, cultural rights, and the *de iure*

abolition of death penalty; fostering pluralism and dynamism of civil society; protecting and empowering local societal actors, human-rights defenders (HRDs), women and youth, intellectuals, journalists and private entrepreneurs and monitoring cases of alleged violations; and promoting equal opportunities and inclusiveness through public, cultural and economic diplomacy. The EU remained consistently engaged with human rights defenders and societal actors, including international NGOs, local CSOs under ACNU, and a wide range of additional independent actors, activists, analysts, journalists and private entrepreneurs inside Cuba. Exchanges included many families of protesters detained. All inputs have nurtured the constant dialogues with the authorities developed under the PDCA. The 4th dialogue on HR was a unique occasion to engage with Cuba on progress made and remaining challenges. Capacity-building activities also focused on digitalisation and other projects with the Justice Ministry. EUDEL also organised a wide-range of public diplomacy activities and public events on HR and fundamental freedoms, including rights of the children, rights of people with disabilities, women's rights and fight against gender-violence, LGBTI rights, cultural and artistic freedoms.

The EU is contributing to resilience and inclusiveness promoting HRD and fundamental freedoms of all Cubans. A special focus was given to good governance, the modernisation of the administration and decentralisation of decision-making, the achievement of the UN SDGs and women empowerment, non-discrimination and participation of vulnerable groups in public affairs. Economic modernisation remains a key objective and the EU is promoting the participation of MSMEs and new economic actors, especially the private sector, in modernisation processes. Socio-economic rights and support to the private sector and MSMEs, including town-hall discussions on the important role of MSMEs, entrepreneurs' fairs or round-tables in FIHAV. The EU has also been promoting biotechnologies, scientific research and advances by supporting ecological and energy transition, sustainability and disaster-preparedness. Creative industries and cultural and artistic freedom and heritage were also supported, in particular throughout the Month of Europe.

Improved access to the internet since 2018 has been a very positive development, fostering citizens' access to information and plurality stimulating debates on social media and access to international media content. A special focus was given to freedom of information online and offline. With increased use of digital services, there is also a risk of digital divide and data-privacy concerns. Polarisation and hate speech in social media are another worrying trend. EUDEL is supporting projects related to modernisation of the administration, capacity building on data privacy and simplification of the administrative burden for citizens' services, trade and investment. The EU is supporting the further development and regulatory compliance of Cuba's bio-tech sector.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: HRD continued to be an integral part of the EU's policy towards Cuba based on 'constructive but critical engagement' under the PDCA. The EU continued to monitor closely the situation and gather input from a wide range of stakeholders (local and international, governmental and non-governmental). Reported violations and specific concerns were discussed with authorities. The EP adopted a resolution on 12 July 2023 in which it urged the Cuban authorities to put an end to the policy of repression. MEPs called for the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained solely for the exercise of their human rights, the withdrawal of abusive criminal charges and for exiles to be allowed to

return. The EU HRVP mission to Havana for the Joint Council and that of the EU SR for HR for the fourth Human Rights Dialogue represented extremely important opportunities for holding frank discussions.

4. EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement has continued to contribute, directly or indirectly, to human rights and democracy in Cuba. Specifically, in 2023, the EU and Cuba signed a EUR 67 million package to support a substantive modernisation process through legal and institutional adjustments aiming at facilitating transparency, efficiency of public services, decentralisation and macroeconomic stability, including a gradual opening-up of the economy to private participation. A targeted portfolio of EUR 3.8 million intends to promote gender equality through support to the implementation of the Cuban gender policy framework with focus on the reduction of all forms of gender-based violence.

5. Multilateral context: Cuba was re-elected to the HRC for the sixth time and it also underwent its 4th Universal Periodic Review. Cuba's Presidency of the G-77+China and the III EU-CELAC Summit provided additional opportunities for high-level engagement. The UNGA adopted on 2 November the Resolution against the US embargo with the unanimous support of all EU Member States (187 countries in total) calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo and against the inclusion of the Cuba in the list of States Sponsors of Terrorism for its impact on Cuban's livelihood.

Commonwealth of Dominica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Dominica is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. In September 2023, Sylvanie Burton was elected President of Dominica. She is the first female and the first President of an indigenous community in the history of the country. The death penalty remains in place in Dominica, although it has not been recently applied. As in much of the Eastern Caribbean, the significant judicial backlog of cases remains a concern.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU key focus in Dominica follow the EU Action Plan on human rights. On LGBTI rights “buggery” and “indecent” provisions remain part of the criminal code of Dominica through the Sexual Offences Act 1998. Sentences range from 5 to 10 years’ imprisonment. Child abuse remains a concern in Dominica. Incidents range from neglect and physical abuse to sexual abuse. As a common trend in the region, the procedures of reporting to the authorities are often too complicated and not victim-centric. Concerning the rule of law,

Dominica's criminality score for 2023 is 2.63, ranking as 184th of 193 countries and 13th of 13 countries in the Caribbean. Courts are under-resourced and understaffed. The government is also working towards a new Juvenile Justice System reform. Dominica is home to the Kalinago, the largest indigenous population in the Eastern Caribbean, with a community of approximately 3500 persons. The government recognises their special status and assigns