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Lesbians and Allies Project
between the U.S. and Cuba
El Mejunje Event 2014



On September 4th 2014, World Sexual Health Day, the US Women and Cuban delegation of 11 women from Seattle, WA arrived in Santa Clara, Cuba for the first conference of the “Lesbians and Allies Project

between the United States and Cuba.” This event took place in Santa Clara for several reasons. In addition to being the capital of the Villa Clara province and located in almost the geographical center of the Cuba it is also a historical center as the site of the last battle in the Cuban Revolution in 1958 and so boasts a mausoleum which houses the remains of Che Guevara. But the key reason was because Santa Clara is home to the historic cultural center “El Mejunje.” For more than 20 years the Mejunje it has been safe haven to the LGBT population through the country.

This project was conceived in May 2012 when the US Women and Cuba delegation met with Las Isabelas, a group of lesbians from Santiago de Cuba, and a decision was made to build a movement that would explore ways that lesbian women and allies from the two countries could learn from and support one another.

This year with help from the amazing activist and coordinator of Las Isabelas, Isel Calzadilla Acosta, along with 18 Cuban lesbian representatives from nine provinces we all gathered for this ground breaking interchange. With vision in hand and historical context from both sides our delegation, families and allies began the day.

When we arrived we were warmly welcomed into the historic Mejunje by women from all over Cuba. Each one of the US delegates received a gift bag of related items including rainbow bracelets, baked clay pieces -- hand painted by the women of Camagüey--, a little cloth bag of stones, and a certificate commemorating our participation in this first interchange of the Lesbians and Allies Project between the women of US and Cuba.

We discussed pressing issues including organizing and educating people on the push for LGBT equality and the fight against homophobia; the work currently being done on partnership and housing rights; health issues; working with the prison system on visitation rights for same sex partners; encouraging younger lesbian involvement; HIV in lesbian communities; aging lesbians; job discrimination; the barriers of organizing in two different languages; how to bring the religious lesbians to the table; and the struggles of adoption for lesbian couples.

And although the afternoon flew by we got as far as the first step, we started to get to know each other! And in closing we discussed ways that the US women could support the Cuban Lesbian’s work here in the US through the Allies project. Some suggestions included sponsoring a National Cuban Lesbian US speaking tour in 2015; supporting groups who are geographically isolated with laptops and USB drives; and calling for the US to end the economic blockade and the travel ban.

It felt like a good first meeting, one in which we got to know each other better and started to hash out some ideas for the work we can do to build a long-term relationship. We talked until we ran out of time for the and then we broke for cultural part of the evening. At which time the sound system started playing loud pop music and many of the Cuban delegates who had previously disappeared, reappeared dancing on stage as Cyndi Lauper, Bruno Mars, and the Backstreet Boys! It was a fabulous end to the first conference of Lesbian and Allies projects between the United States and Cuba.