

## ESTADO DE SATS

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## CUBA

*Strengthening Cuban Civil Society*

National Endowment for Democracy

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### **1. SUMMARY**

Time will continue to take its toll on Cuba's ill-fated Revolution's historic leadership; but a transition to democracy is not guaranteed by their imminent demise. Their heirs apparent, related by blood and marriage to the dying elite, are at play, working to maintain absolute power through superficial reforms, while violating basic human rights. They do neither acknowledge a legitimate opposition, or the necessity of real changes. Cuban-based Estado de Sats is devoted to the empowerment of Cuba's emerging civil society. It is committed to the peaceful transition to democracy, and is providing forums for interaction, analysis and discussion of ideas, as well as leadership and professional training independent from government control. Sats works to organize a real opposition by demanding and promoting changes to the legal framework, to preempt the looming farce of regime-sponsored "loyal opposition." For this purpose Sats will work to prepare a capable opposition able to put forward a valid alternative and draft and implement effective public policies.

In the aftermath of the Obama-Castro deal on December 17th, 2014, Sats transformed "*Por Otra Cuba*" campaign into the *#TodosMarchamos* campaign in alliance with other groups. Therefore, it is important to clarify that *#TodosMarchamos* does not belong to SATS, but it is a joint effort with other groups. This coalition has been organized as the Forum for Rights and Freedom. Sats will follow up the "*Por Otra Cuba*" with *#TodosMarchamos* campaign seeking the similar objectives of "*Por Otra Cuba*" redefining as the "*Hoja de Ruta*", and as such Sats will continue to (a) train multitask groups of academics and professionals to analyze and propose solutions to Cuba's pressing issues, (b) publicize them, (c) draw its inspiration on the experience of Eastern European dissidents and the Helsinki Accords, (d) demand the Cuban regime's ratification and implementation of the United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Optional Protocols (the “Covenants”), (e) publicize the Covenants and articulate civil society groups to demand the exercise of the rights they embody as they relate to cross sections of the population, (f) coordinate efforts to press on for the changes to Cuba’s legal system, as required by the Covenants, and (g) otherwise press on the road to Cuba’s freedom.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

In 2006, Fidel Castro temporarily transferred power to his brother Raul Castro. In 2008, the monarchical succession was formally completed. After more than half a century of the Cuban Revolution, Cubans remain under the rule of a totalitarian, oppressive regime, and as a consequence Cubans' standard of living remains low and their cost of living high. Although small, limited transformation has been introduced in the last few years, Cubans do not enjoy any civil or political liberty and their social, economic and cultural rights continue to be extremely restricted. However, these limited transformations that include the legalization and commercialization of new technologies, such as DVD players, computers, and cell-phones, combined with the elimination of the exit permit that implicates an increased freedom of movement, are positive circumstances for civil society’s development and expansion. Under this new environment, Sats has taken the opportunity to create a successful space to boost civil society and push for a peaceful transition to democracy, market economy, and rule of law.

In 2008, Cuba signed the main U.N.’s Covenants, but remains elusive to ratify them. The ratification and implementation offers to the civil society very valuable tools because the domestic legislation has to be modified in compliance with the covenants and they provide legal remedies against human rights abuses. If Cuba ratifies the international covenants, the Cuban civil society will be able to follow the precedent of the Helsinki’s accords that provided the civil society under the Iron Curtain with tools, legal and others, to fight for fundamental freedoms in Eastern Europe. Sats is campaigning for the ratification and implementation of the Covenants will require changes to the legal framework to conform local law to the rights embodied in the Covenants, thereby leveling the playing field for the civil rights activists in the field.

The exact evolution of the situation in Cuba is still hard to predict. While everyone agrees that change is inevitable in the short/medium term, it is not possible to anticipate how violent or peaceful, gradual or sudden, it will be. While everyone would love to see an Arab Spring situation soon, no one wants the Arab Winter that followed those promising events.

Seeking change, while planning for post-change governability, thus preventing its transformation from an oppressive totalitarian regime into a failed state is the only wise option for policy planners and pro-democracy forces, not an option between two separate and opposite alternatives, but the only comprehensive and sensible option.

No one can anticipate the social/political alliances to emerge, which will prove capable of neither leading change, nor the type of interests they will be serving. Such widespread uncertainty about the future acts as strong disincentive for the mobilization of the population against the regime. There is widespread malaise and general frustration with the present situation; it is unlikely that

most persons will be ready to support the representatives of the opposition and dissident movements unless they come to believe that change is not only desirable but viable, and that their personal future will be brighter if it materializes. It is true that the present widespread malaise and increasing unrest can take the form of social explosions under certain circumstances. It is unpredictable. No one can predict if those committed and will to fight for change can be controlled at the end, as in 1994 Havana, deflate on their own in the absence of appropriate leadership and organization, or even expand to disrupt a whole city, province, or even the whole country. In the latter scenario, like Libya, there will be very little time to celebrate. The issue of what forces and programs will come to the helm "the day after" should be thoroughly considered today.

Forging a solid alliance capable of ushering indispensable change, while also able to manage it and, what is most important, ensure governability in the post-change stage, and requires that we start working today on creating the necessary capabilities. Cuba needs a capable and skilled opposition to put forward a viable government alternative and public policy makers.

The general Cuban population also keeps prudent distance from pro-democracy activists in order to avoid state reprisals, but also because the average citizen does not have any "natural" space to mingle with them in apparently non-political activities. Even the many different ideologically inclined dissidents have lacked the possibility of holding some sort of regular interaction with most of the political activists of the opposition.

Estado de Sats created for the first time a cultural/political umbrella that acted as a hub to interconnect members of those different currents. While the many opposition groups have gradually created the initial fabric of an emerging political civil society, Estado de Sats represents the first sign of a broad, plural, cultural movement -with a clear underlying political focus- that engages artists, creators, and intellectuals willing to interact with each other.

But despite the dissemination throughout the Island of USB drivers/flash memories, discs, and printed materials with the recording of their many activities, the presence of Estado de Sats remains physically limited to the home of its founder, Antonio Rodiles, in the city of Havana. Such hubs for free exchanges among social / political forces are painfully lacking in the rest of the Island. Establishing a deeper, broader, strategic cooperation between Estado de Sats and the rainbow of other dissident and opposition forces would enable this project to forge an attractive and creative space for prodemocracy activists to interact with the general population throughout Cuba.

Resistance to oppression requires a set of circumstances to coincide. The very existence of oppression and injustice is not a sufficient condition for individuals to take practical action to resist or rebel against it. Most people will not move from a condition of bystanders to that of activists unless they come to believe that there is a credible and achievable alternative to their situation. The Cuban people do not need to be convinced of the disadvantages of the current regime, but they still need to be persuaded that they can actually do something to change it for the better. Achieving consensus among a broad coalition of prodemocracy forces on an

attractive, credible, brief and popular program of simple points and coordinating the many agents of change (political, intellectual, economic, cultural) for its promotion is feasible.

Seeking the mobilization of bystanders into action while taking preventive steps to make sure that "the day after" will not fall into the hands of opportunistic forces, is a concrete way to promote democracy today and, simultaneously, prevent a failed state tomorrow. It is an investment in a Cuban Spring with no Cuban Winter in its aftermath.

### 3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Short-term Objectives:

- To continue the *#TodosMarchamos* campaign.
- To train human resources in transitional and post-transitional topics.
- To educate the academic community, intellectuals, the Cuban citizenry, as well as the international community about the potential transition to democracy.

Long-term Objectives:

- To continue the development of a national network of free spaces for the general population to interact safely with members of the Cuban pro-democracy movements.
- To continue strengthening *Estado de Sats* in order to grow as an independent think tank inside Cuba, capable of developing proposals for the transition and post-transition.

### 4. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

#### ***#TodosMarchamos* campaign**

This campaign is aimed at reclaiming the public space and basic human rights issues through peaceful public demonstrations. Consequently, *#TodosMarchamos* campaign pushes forward for particular reforms and eventually regime change.

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign is being developed domestically and internationally by a broad coalition. This coalition has organized dozens of peaceful demonstrations demanding fundamental rights and freedoms. We are working to create a national committee to push inside the Island and an international committee to do so abroad. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign will take all necessary steps to demand fundamental rights and freedom. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign inside the Island is doing outreach to the civil society activists and general population. The campaign is promoting events such as peaceful public demonstrations, panels, workshops, art expositions, movie and documentary projections and discussions, and music concerts. The campaign outreach is also targeting several audiences with information distribution in several formats like DVDs, USB drivers, flyers, posters. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign has distributed information through visual spots and is developing podcasts known as "*Cambio de Bola*."

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign outside will do outreach to the international community. The international committee will put together efforts to lobby European and Latin American governments to request rights and freedoms.

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign will organize festivals/conferences in Cuba, Latin America, North America and Europe to promote the campaign. The festival will gather artists, academics, and activists while giving participants the opportunity to network and organize more activities to push for these goals. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign expects to organize at least four human rights-oriented festivals similar to the International Summit celebrated in Sats' headquarters in Havana last December, 2013.

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign will work with island-wide partners and world-wide partners to organize parallel events to international conference to push for the covenants' ratification and implementation. In addition, we will work to lobby other inter-governmental organizations to press further on this issue.

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign will continue and expand outreach efforts through a website and social media. These online platforms will be combined with outreach inside the Island by distributing USB drivers, discs and printed materials. *#TodosMarchamos* will be boosted with a more aggressive outreach to break Cuban regime's information blockage.

*#TodosMarchamos* campaign's website and its associated social media are focused on promoting human rights. These website and associated social media are non-profit, non-partisan, and non-ideological in its editorial philosophy. These media platforms receive contributions from in-house writers, outside contributors and translators who work either pro-bono or received compensations. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign is developing a plan to spread its materials through packages to be distributed inside the Island in USB drivers. "*#TodosMarchamos*" campaign targets international audiences that provide feedback by comments, sponsor signatures, email, and page usage statistic. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign is considering to link to PayPal to receive donations. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign publishes around three posts weekly.

Sats will train human rights activists to promote and defend human rights. The timeline for the human rights defenders trainings is expected last a total of ten days divided in two periods of five days. Sats is developing a handbook to enable human rights defenders and the general population to defend their rights by utilizing Cuban domestic legislation and international mechanisms. Sats expects to train around twelve (12) within the first year, and expects to increase that number in the following year to twenty and so on.

### **Educating the academic community, intellectuals, the Cuban citizenry, as well as the international community about the potential transition to democracy**

Sats will continue and expand its role educating the Cuban civil society about the viability of the transition to democracy. Sats will sponsor panels, debates, and other outreach activities for this purpose. Sats will distribute these materials through a website and social media as well as non-conventional means such as USB drivers, discs, printed materials and any other available means.

### **Developing an independent think tank.**

Sats expect to develop academic teams able to propose public policies for the transition period and post-transition. The teams formed by specialists with recognized expertise in topic mentioned above, will participate in our training program with leading regional think tanks and universities to update their knowledge, learn from colleagues, and shared best practices. The

experts will make punctual policy recommendation in the topics of interests and their finding will be disseminated through our outreach efforts. Besides our own outreach channels, Sats expect to disseminate these policy findings through outside research magazines, conferences, and other means as available.

## 5. EVALUATION PLAN

Sats will evaluate every three months the progress of the project.

1. *#TodosMarchamos* campaign will be measured by:
  - Peaceful public demonstrations and walks.
  - The number of people that get involved in the campaign.
  - The events will take place and the concrete results or consequence of these events.
  - The amounts of materials distributed and the feedback received.
  - The online activity, website usage, and users' feedback.
  - The number of lobby missions deployed and achieved results.
2. To train human resources in transitional and post-transitional topics will be measured by:
  - The number of human rights activists trained.
  - The number of research materials and events organized by those professionals and artists trained.
  - The number procedures, demands, communications submitted by human rights defenders.
3. To educate the academic community, intellectuals, as well as the general population about the potential transition to democracy.
  - The number of published papers, presentations, workshops, and movie and documentary discussions focused on the transition related-topics.
4. To continue strengthening Estado de SATS in order to grow as an independent think tank inside Cuba, capable of developing proposals for the transition and post-transition.
  - The development of working groups.
  - The number of published papers.
  - The quality of public policy proposals.

## 6. INTERIM ASSESSMENT

Sats is submitting a proposal to expand its current project. After few years working, Sats has grown in strength and capacity to take on increasing responsibilities and build up upon its previous work. Sats' assessment of the ongoing project is very positive. Despite the regime's strong repression, over the last year Sats has been able to:

1. Distribute thousands of DVDs throughout the Island.
2. Distribute information in USB drivers, which are replicated later.
3. The promotion of the *#TodosMarchamos* campaign, seeking the "Hoja de Ruta".
4. Sats has distributed thousands flyers as part of the *#TodosMarchamos* campaign.

5. Sats has hosted or organized dozens workshops about human rights related to the U.N.'s Covenants.
6. Sats launched in coalition with the Forum of Rights and Freedom, *#TodosMarchamos* campaign.
7. Sats has been systematic in maintaining a diverse and open program to appeal to wide spectrums of Cuban civil society.
8. Sats has improved the quality of its audiovisual and multimedia productions.
9. Sats has incorporated social media channels to publicize its work.

For all these accomplishments, the strong impact Sats is having both inside and outside Cuba, Sats is proposing an expansion of the ongoing project to emphasize on previous goals and activities, such as *#TodosMarchamos* campaign and spread out in its reach as well as in its overall impact.

## **7. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND**

State of SATS is a space where different visions, from art, thought and social activism, come together and affect the sketch of a diverse and plural Cuba. We work in reporting and proposal development projects that generate and develop, directly or indirectly, more spacious and coordinates related to our times. Within the project inhabit different sections merge into a contemporary vision of the Cuban nation. Estado de Sats projects into the stability of a cultural and educational space can generate actions to influence the thinking and policies of the country.

Estado de Sats first big conference took place in July 2010. Sats has utilized new technologies to provide an open, non biased platform to Cuban civil society. Sats's mission is to promote a peaceful transition to democracy, free market economy and rule of law. For these purposes, Sats team collaboratively works with diverse actors. Sats make available a platform to different projects presented by intellectuals, academics, artists, lawyers, activists, independent workers (cuentapropistas), and leading civil society actors from Cuba as well as exiles.

Established under the slogan "Confluence of Art and Thought", Sats has developed several programs to empower Cuban civil society. The most prominent are:

1. Cinema at all Costs. A space dedicated to promoting the audiovisual work censored in Cuba (not only domestically produced).
2. FORA analysis is a group comprised of citizens interested in contributing to the study, discussion, analysis and proposals concerning the current state of national problems. Part of the methodological approach, based on the concept of complexity that characterizes contemporary societies.
3. El CafeSATSo: Literature and poetry gathering.
4. Other artistic activities: Art expositions, concerts, theater, and performances.
5. The magazine Cuadernos de Transición. It has been halted due the confiscation of the latest print. We don't anticipate resuming at this time.
6. Sats hosted the first-ever, alternative International Human Rights Summit in Havana with thematic panels, art expositions, concerts and other activities.

7. Sats hosted Playback Theater
8. Sats developed and hosted edition workshops to train independent journalist and the general public in edition techniques.
9. Sats printed and distributed tens of thousands of flyers, DVDs, USB drivers, and other materials about human rights.
10. Workshops *#TodosMarchamos*. Sats hosted and several workshops throughout the Island about human rights.
11. Sats produced and presented the documentary “Gusano” showing the Cuban regime repressive tactics. Now with almost half million views on YouTube.
12. Sats produced and presented the documentary about “cuentapropistas”, an interview with an entrepreneur and potential labor leader.
13. Sats has produced policy papers to advocate human rights and democracy and in particular to ensure these issues within the European Union’s framework for a potential agreement with Cuba.