
CUBA

Republic of Cuba

Population: 11.3 million (2.8 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 46,000 (estimate)

Compulsory recruitment age: 17

Voluntary recruitment age: unknown

Voting age: 16

Optional Protocol: signed 13 October 2000

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138

Compulsory military service exists from the age of 17 and can be performed in the armed forces or in the police force. Military education is compulsory for secondary students. Some 15 educational institutes are run by the armed forces, which take students from the age of 15.

Context

There was a severe deterioration of human rights in 2003, with the detention, trial and imprisonment of 75 activists for up to 28 years and the execution by firing squad of three men convicted of involvement in a hijacking. The European Union (EU), which had opened an office in Havana days before the detentions in March 2003, severely criticized the crackdown. It reiterated its commitment to supplying aid to the Cuban population and called for the US embargo to be lifted.¹

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The constitution states that defence of the socialist homeland is the greatest honour and the supreme duty of every Cuban citizen (Article 65).² All men, women and children are expected to take a role – usually determined by the state – in defending the nation. According to the governmental doctrine of “war of the people” (*Guerra de todo el pueblo*), in the event of major military aggression, “each citizen will have a place and a way to confront the enemy till victory is attained”.³ The elderly, children and mothers are not expected to engage in armed combat and may be given only supporting roles like cooking and organizing supplies.⁴

The 1973 Law on General Military Service (*Servicio Militar Activo y el de Reserva*) regulates military conscription. Under the Law on National Defence (*Defensa Nacional*), Law No. 75 of 21 January 1994, all citizens between 17 and 28 years of age must do two years’ military service

(Article 67). Cuba confirmed that the minimum age for conscription was 17 in its initial report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1996.⁵ During negotiations on the Optional Protocol, Cuba supported 17 as a minimum age for compulsory recruitment, and does not support a “straight-18” position.⁶

The Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces may decree alternative forms of military service, as long as military preparedness is maintained.⁷ Military service may be performed in the armed forces or in the police force, which is under the control of the Interior Ministry. In practice, military service is compulsory for men only. Special measures guarantee the right of women to take part in defence activities, both as professional soldiers and as members of the Women’s Voluntary Military Service for a two-year service period. Students may complete their service in a shorter period in order to continue their education.⁸

The Youth Labour Army (*Ejército Juvenil del Trabajo*) is part of the army. Among its aims are “to participate in the military preparation of its members and in armed combat; to contribute to the education and the patriotic, military, labouring, sporting and cultural instruction of young people”. It is organized in divisions, regiments and battalions and its members are paid a salary in accordance with the regulations.⁹

Military training and military schools

According to the constitution, the aims of education in Cuba include the promotion of “patriotic education” and the combination of “general education and specialized scientific, technical and artistic instruction with ... participation in political, social and military activities” (Article 38).¹⁰ Military instruction is compulsory for secondary students.¹¹

There are about 15 specialized educational establishments run by the armed forces, *Institutos Preuniversitarios Vocacionales “Camilo Cienfuegos”* (Camilo Cienfuegos Vocational Pre-University Institutes), which prepare students for entrance into higher military schools. There are also 13 *Institutos Preuniversitarios Militares* (Military Pre-University Institutes) for conscripts who wish to continue their studies at the military schools (tertiary level).¹² Students entering preparatory vocational institutes are usually between 15 and 18 years old.¹³

Several military academies and schools provide training for officers and specialist members of the armed forces.¹⁴

Militias

Nearly all adult workers not already part of the regular military reserves are members of the territorial militia (*milicias de tropas territoriales*), which functions on the principles of “voluntary [recruitment], selectivity and territoriality”.

Women form the largest group.¹⁵ The militia is part of the armed forces, and its members may participate in armed combat and other defence activities. Organized in divisions, regiments, battalions, independent companies and “special units”, its members are considered soldiers when participating in military activities. They are equipped with infantry weapons and anti-air artillery, which they keep near their homes “to guarantee the quick deployment of weapons in case of need”, although these are not freely available to members.¹⁶ The militia is financed by “voluntary contributions” in kind and in cash from the population. In 2002, workers, peasants, students and others contributed 34 million pesos (about US\$1.26 million) to the militia.¹⁷ Under-18s cannot be members of the militias.¹⁸

* see glossary for information about internet sources

- 1 *Amnesty International Report 2004*, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>.
- 2 Constitution, <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Constitutions/Cuba/cuba1992.html>.
- 3 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, http://www.cubagob.cu/otras_info/minfar.
- 4 Confidential source, July 2004.
- 5 Initial report of Cuba to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/8/Add.30, 15 February 1996, <http://www.ohchr.org>.
- 6 UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflicts on its sixth session, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2000/74, 27 March 2000, <http://www.ohchr.org>.
- 7 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, op. cit. (Fundamentos, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, Servicio militar).
- 8 M.P. Castillo, “Réquiem por el servicio militar obligatorio”, *Cubamet*, 7 December 1998.
- 9 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, op. cit. (Fundamentos, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, Ejército Juvenil del Trabajo).
- 10 UNESCO, *Principios y objetivos generales de la educación en Cuba*, Country profiles: Cuba, August 2003, at <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/Databanks/Dossiers/mainfram.htm> (Cuba, Profiles).
- 11 Confidential source, op.cit.
- 12 Ministry of Education, <http://www.rimed.cu/Enseñanzas/preuniversitario.asp>.
- 13 See graph, UNESCO, op. cit.
- 14 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, op. cit. (Fundamentos, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, Academias y Escuelas Militares).
- 15 Confidential source, op. cit.
- 16 Confidential source, op. cit.
- 17 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, op. cit. (Fundamentos, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, Milicias).
- 18 Confidential source, op. cit.