



A group from the National Association of Women Lawyers joined the National Association of Women Judges (New York chapter) on an educational research trip to Cuba, from September 29 through October 5, 2009. The delegation spent the time learning from Cuban judges, lawyers and government officials to compare and contrast our legal systems. The activities included:

- Meeting with members of the UNJC (National Association of Cuban Jurists), leaders of the Cuban Society of Civil Rights and Family Law and professors from the University of Havana Law School. We received a detailed presentation on Cuba's newly-adopted family law, as well as its commercial law, and participated in a spirited Q&A session.
- Visiting a provincial courthouse and meeting with a group of judges to discuss an experimental family and juvenile court system for implementing the new family law.
- Visiting a private law firm and meeting with practicing attorneys to discuss the private practice of law in Cuba.
- Hearing the perspective of the Cuban government about U.S. and Cuban relations, as presented to us by speakers at the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People.
- Meeting with members and leaders of the Federation of Cuban Women, a national, community-based guidance center for women and families. Speakers discussed the organization's grass roots effort to promote the interests and well-being of women.
- Meeting with Mariela Castro Espín, daughter of Raul Castro and niece of Fidel. Ms. Espín is the director of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education (CENSEX). Ms. Espín reported about the history CENSEX and current issues involving family planning, women's rights, and LGBT rights in Cuba.
- Attending a presentation about the "Cuban Five," as presented by a Cuban-American attorney and member of the legal team representing five Cuban nationals who were convicted and are serving sentences in the United States for acts of espionage, conspiracy to commit murder and other crime.

Between official meetings and visits we enjoyed a variety of cultural activities - visits to museums, art galleries (including a visit to the colorful home of artist Jose Fuster), music venues and nature parks. Some of us saw a spectacular performance of the Cuban Ballet, while others saw a concert by surviving members of the Buena Vista Social Club at the famous Hotel National.

Without doubt, there are stark differences between the laws, individual rights and politics of our countries, and we saw in our travel group a wide range of opinions and reactions to our experiences. We can all agree, however, that the visit was instructive, enlightening and confirms that Cuba is a place to watch in the years to come.