Anti-Homophobia Campaign in Cuba

March 26, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

As a first-generation Cuban-American openly gay and HIV-positive man, I can bear witness to both how pervasive and oppressive homophobia is in Cuban culture. Cuba is far from being alone in its homophobia, but Cuban culture is certainly well versed in it.

All that said, much has changed and is changing in Cuba. For example, racial issues have definitely improved. Now, it also seems that at least lip service is being paid to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Cuban Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) has launched an anti-homophobia campaign, primarily targeted at youth. CENESEX will be hosting a series of panel discussions and other events starting today through June at the University of Havana.

Mariela Castro, the daughter of Cuban president Raul Castro, is the director of CENESEX, but she may not be the only reason for this campaign. One of the events is a screening of *Milk*. Sean Penn won his second Oscar for best actor portraying the lead character, Harvey Milk, who was the first prominent openly gay elected official in the United States.

Penn has recently visited Cuba. Whatever you or I may think about his politics (and for my part, I'm not sure how I feel about Penn's politics in regards to Cuba), I wouldn't be surprised if Penn's influence played a part in launching the campaign.

As for my feelings about the campaign itself, I'm excited by the possibility that Cuba could one day be a beacon for LGBT diversity and inclusion. However, I'll be keeping a healthy dose of skepticism until that day arrives.

Hat tip to the LGBT blog Blabbeando for this story!

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