

Cuban Bullies at the U.N.

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More than a half century after the triumph of the Cuban revolution, the image of Fidel Castro in battle fatigues remains a symbol of the military dictatorship's machismo. But last week when Cuba's most famous dissident blogger, who looks like she could be blown away by the wind, showed up at the United Nations to give a press conference, the Cuban tough guys had a meltdown.

Yoani Sánchez was scheduled to speak to the U.N. Correspondents Association. What she would say was not much of a mystery. For almost six years she has been surreptitiously posting, from Havana, biting observations about daily life in the revolutionary paradise on her Generation Y blog. Ms. Sánchez is a gifted writer who describes how it feels to be a mother who cannot get milk for her child or a young person who is forbidden to speak of a dream not approved by the state or even to connect to the internet. She is not shy about describing the high-life hypocrisy of the apparatchiki either. It's little wonder that when the Cuban mission at the U.N. found out that this nonconformist would have an audience with journalists at Turtle Bay it went ballistic.

Cuba had organized protests in Brazil against Ms. Sánchez during her visit there earlier in the month. And it was suspected of doing so at other venues in New York where she had appeared. But according to the Miami Herald complaints from Cuban diplomats at the U.N. "marked the first time that officials of Cuba's communist-run government are confirmed to have tried to disrupt a Sánchez public appearance."

Proof of that effort was reported by AFP, which said it had obtained a copy of a protest letter sent to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon from Cuban Ambassador Rodolfo Reyes. Mr. Reyes wrote that Ms. Sánchez's press

conference would be "anti-Cuban" and, according to AFP a "'grave attack' on the cooperative climate of the United Nations." The secretary general should "not allow the organization's spaces to be tarnished and their use manipulated by spurious interests," the letter reportedly said.

The sabotage was only partly successful. Ms. Sánchez was blocked from appearing in the large auditorium where news conferences are normally held and was instead banished to a cramped area unsuited for the size of the crowd that came to hear her. But she was not deterred. "If this meeting was being held in the bottom of an elevator shaft, we would have more freedom than in Cuba," she said. "I am proud that my first time in this very significant U.N. building is with my journalism colleagues."

She also had some choice words for the U.N. According to the Herald, Ms. "Sánchez denounced the Cuban complaints during her news conference and said that it's time for the United Nations to 'come out of its lethargy and recognize that the Cuban government is a dictatorship.'"