



Cuba to provide free sex-change

Cuba has authorised sex-change operations and will offer them free to qualifying citizens, officials say.

The move is the latest in a series of policy changes implemented by President Raul Castro since he succeeded his elder brother, Fidel, in February.

Raul Castro's daughter, who heads the National Centre for Sex Education, spearheaded the changes in a country renowned for sexual conservatism.

So far 28 transsexuals in the country have requested the operation.

Vibrant and discreet

Last month, for only the second time, the Cuban authorities joined events to marking International Day against Homophobia.

Raul Castro's daughter, Mariela, has also pushed for the state to recognise same sex unions and inheritance rights.

If adopted the reforms would give Cuba the most liberal gay rights in Latin America, says the BBC's Michael Voss in Havana.

Since becoming Cuba's first new president since the 1959 revolution, Raul Castro has also done away with bans that kept most Cubans from owning mobile phones in their own names and renting hotel rooms and cars.

His government also has decentralised the floundering state agricultural sector, raised pensions and salaries for some state employees.

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