

Film bares alleged plight of homosexuals in Cuba

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HAVANA — A controversial film which highlights the alleged plight of homosexuals in Cuba is on show around the world, much to the annoyance of Fidel Castro's government.

"Improper Conduct" deals with Cubans who have fled the Communist-run island partly for political or artistic reasons but also because of what they describe as organized repression of homosexuals.

Such a scathing attack on the Cuban authorities would never be permitted to be shown publicly here though word of the film, financed in France, has spread quickly.

"It is yet another example of a disinformation campaign to blacken Cuba's image in a number of Western countries," said a Communist Party official who had read reports of the documentary.

The film, much praised during a summer movie festival in New York, was directed by two prominent anti-Castro exiles, Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez-Leal.

They openly acknowledged that they did not try to present a balanced view as they felt the Cuban revolution had been glamorized by an indulgent world media over the past 25 years.

The film consists mainly of a series of interviews with exiled intellectuals, many of whom said they were forced to flee by an official campaign against anyone thought guilty of "improper conduct," the legal term used here to cover homosexuality, among other things.

They said that during the 1960s thousands of Cuban men suspected of being homosexuals were impris-

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oned in camps in the central province of Camaguey for "rehabilitation."

The documentary also maintains that though the camps, euphemistically called UMAPs from the Spanish acronym for military production aid units, have been disbanded, homosexuals still suffer continual harassment.

Cuban officials admit that the camps existed, saying they were a mistake made during the early ultra-idealistic days of the revolution.

Homosexual behavior is not specifically outlawed under the Cuban constitution. But there is a strong puritan element in modern Cuba's Communist society, perhaps in reaction to pre-revolutionary days when Havana was infamous for its brothels, sex clubs and general moral laxity.

In addition, the presence of thousands of flamboyant homosexuals was felt as an affront to Castro's ideas about forging a "manly" society, purged of what was seen as North American decadence, and capable of confronting U.S. military might.

But the authorities maintain that the stridently anti-homosexual era is now history and such is their sensitivity to any suggestion to the contrary that the official newspaper Granma recently devoted almost half a page in reply to a French television program.

The program, shown in June, leveled similar charges to those of "Im-

proper Conduct" and Granma's international edition called them "unbelievable" and "grotesque."

The Cuban authorities appear correct in their insistence that no such official repression now exists, and the homosexuality of many leading writers and artists here is an open secret.

"Provided the 'maricones' (as homosexuals are known throughout the Spanish-speaking world) lead basically normal lives and do not flaunt their condition in public, they have nothing to fear," one government spokesman said.

He said those homosexuals forced to leave Cuba during the 1980 Mariel boat exodus to Florida were delinquents or had openly indulged in what he described as anti-social behavior.

Homosexuals themselves generally confirm the government's version though they say they are often subject to the kind of public ridicule or abuse that is common in many countries, irrespective of their political systems.

They have their own favorite bars and meeting places in Havana though the official tolerance level of any unconventional behavior is such that a gay rights organization would be entirely out of the question in Cuba.

The authorities privately acknowledge that no known homosexual is likely to reach a position of real power or even be allowed into the Communist Party.