

6-21-2007

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Mike Leffert

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Recommended Citation

Leffert, Mike. "Vilma Espin—deborah—dies In Cuba; A Legacy Of Human Rights And Public Health Activism Lives On." (2007).
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Vilma Espin's death; Deborah's death; dies In Cuba; A Legacy Of Human Rights And Public Health Activism Lives On

by Mike Leffert

Category/Department: Cuba

Published: Thursday, June 21, 2007

"The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba has declared official mourning in the country on the occasion of the death of outstanding revolutionary fighter Vilma Espin Guillois." So reads an official notice in Prensa Latina to mark the death of "the most admired and respected woman leader in Cuba." Espin was also known as Cuba's first lady, not just because her husband is interim President of Cuba Raul Castro but also because she served as first lady for Fidel Castro, who kept his own wife out of the public limelight. But Espin's accomplishments went much further than that. She was a fighter and hero of the revolution and a lifelong leader in her own right for gender equity and gay rights, and a protagonist for the creation of a health-care system that is the envy of much of the world. Espin, also known since the revolution by the nom de guerre Deborah, died in Havana June 18 after a long illness, thought to be cancer according to a televised announcement that called her a "heroine of the underground, an outstanding fighter of the rebel army, and a tireless struggler for the emancipation of women and the defense of the rights of the child." She was a Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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