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Cubans can now build their own homes

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7th January, 2009

THE ARTICLE

Times are changing quickly in Cuba. Cubans can now build their own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has announced changes to help the nation's housing shortage. For the past five decades, people had to rely on the government to provide them with houses. There was no such thing as housing loans or a property market. The new reforms will allow people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties must follow strict building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must stick to. Mr. Castro explained his decision live on television, telling his people: "I've given you this amount of space....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

Housing has become a serious problem in Cuba. There are now too few houses for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching record levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has had difficulty keeping to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has been made worse by three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed in the fierce winds and driving rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was delighted with the news. "My dream to have my own home may soon come true," he said. This may be easier said than done. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials are only available on the black market.

WARM-UPS

1. HOMES: Walk around the class and talk to other students about homes. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*changing times / housing / the past five decades / property market / guidelines / space
serious problem / overcrowding / targets / hurricane / being delighted / average wage*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. MY HOME: What is important in a home? Complete the table below. Talk about your table with your partner(s). Change partners and share what you heard.

Thing	How important and why	Your home now
Size		
Large kitchen		
Gardens		
Expensive furniture		
Good neighbourhood		
Many toilets		

4. HOMEOWNER: Students A **strongly** believe it's better to own your own home than rent; Students B **strongly** believe renting property is much better than buying. Change partners again and talk about your conversations.

5. CHANGING TIMES: Are times changing? Talk about how these things are changing with your partner(s). Change partners and talk again.

- Me
- My English
- Prices
- My taste in music and fashion
- My country
- The weather
- My thoughts about my future
- Technology

6. PROPERTY: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'property'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. People in Cuba are attending free house-building workshops. | T / F |
| b. People could build their own homes 55 years ago. | T / F |
| c. Cubans have been unable to get a housing loan for the past 50 years. | T / F |
| d. People in Cuba are free to design their houses any way they choose. | T / F |
| e. There aren't enough houses in Cuba for people to live in. | T / F |
| f. Cuba's government couldn't manage to build 100,000 houses a year. | T / F |
| g. Very bad weather in 2008 added to Cuba's housing shortage. | T / F |
| h. Average wages in Cuba are only \$170 a month. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. quickly | a. to be had |
| 2. rely | b. limits |
| 3. reforms | c. likely |
| 4. restrictions | d. depend |
| 5. stick to | e. huge |
| 6. serious | f. salary |
| 7. tiny | g. fast |
| 8. potential | h. follow |
| 9. wage | i. changes |
| 10. available | j. small |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Times are changing | a. on the government |
| 2. changes to help the nation's | b. record levels |
| 3. people had to rely | c. rain |
| 4. properties must follow strict | d. housing shortage |
| 5. live on | e. television |
| 6. There are now too | f. market |
| 7. Overcrowding is reaching | g. quickly in Cuba |
| 8. fierce winds and driving | h. than done |
| 9. easier said | i. building guidelines |
| 10. only available on the black | j. few houses |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Times are _____ quickly in Cuba. Cubans can now build their own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has _____ changes to help the nation's housing shortage. For the past five decades, people had to _____ on the government to provide them with houses. There was no such thing as housing loans or a property _____. The new reforms will allow people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties must _____ strict building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must _____ to. Mr. Castro explained his decision _____ on television, telling his people: "I've given you this _____ of space....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

follow
rely
amount
changing
live
market
announced
stick

Housing has become a _____ problem in Cuba. There are now too few houses for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching _____ levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has had _____ keeping to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has been made _____ by three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed in the fierce winds and _____ rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was _____ with the news. "My dream to have my own home may soon come true," he said. This may be _____ said than done. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials are only available on the _____ market.

easier
record
worse
black
serious
driving
difficulty
delighted

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

Times are changing quickly in Cuba. Cubans _____ own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has announced _____ nation's housing shortage. For the past five decades, people had to rely on the government to provide them with houses. There _____ housing loans or a property market. The new reforms will allow people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties _____ building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must stick to. Mr. Castro explained his decision _____, telling his people: "I've given you this _____....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

Housing has become a serious problem in Cuba. There are _____ for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching record levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has _____ to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has _____ by three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed _____ and driving rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was delighted with the news. "My dream _____ may soon come true," he said. This may be easier said than done. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials _____ black market.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'property' and 'market'.

property	market

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• quickly• past• such• still• stick• space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• few• keeping• hit• news• easier• market
---	--

STUDENT HOMES SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about homes in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

HOMES DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'home'?
- c) Do you think most Cubans will be happy with this news?
- d) How important is it to own your own home?
- e) What kind of help does your government give people with housing?
- f) Would you like to design your own home?
- g) Do you think it's risky to take out a housing loan?
- h) What things do you rely on your government to do?
- i) Do you think the property market is a good or bad thing?
- j) Do you think times are changing quickly?

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HOMES DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Is housing a serious problem in your country?
- c) What would you do if you lived in overcrowded conditions?
- d) Is it the custom in your country for people to live with their families? Is this good or bad?
- e) How does the weather affect housing in your country?
- f) In England, a person's home is their "castle". What do you think this means? Is it the same in your country?
- g) What was the last piece of news you were delighted with?
- h) When was the last time you thought "that's easier said than done"?
- i) Have you ever bought something on the black market?
- j) What questions would you like to ask Raul Castro?

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LANGUAGE

Times are changing (1) _____ in Cuba. Cubans can now build their own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has announced changes to help the nation's housing (2) _____. For the past five decades, people had to rely on the government to provide them with houses. There was no (3) _____ thing as housing loans or a property market. The new reforms will (4) _____ people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties must follow strict building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must (5) _____ to. Mr. Castro explained his decision (6) _____ on television, telling his people: "I've given you this amount of space....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

Housing has become a serious problem in Cuba. There are now too (7) _____ houses for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching record levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has had (8) _____ keeping to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has been made worse (9) _____ three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed in the fierce winds and (10) _____ rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was delighted with the news. "My dream to have my own home may soon come true," he said. This may be easier said than (11) _____. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials are only available on the (12) _____ market.

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. | (a) quicken | (b) quick | (c) quickening | (d) quickly |
| 2. | (a) shortage | (b) short of | (c) shorts | (d) shortest |
| 3. | (a) much | (b) such | (c) so | (d) many |
| 4. | (a) allowable | (b) allowance | (c) allow | (d) allowing |
| 5. | (a) glue | (b) sellotape | (c) stick | (d) bond |
| 6. | (a) lively | (b) live | (c) liven | (d) lives |
| 7. | (a) for | (b) far | (c) free | (d) few |
| 8. | (a) difficulty | (b) different | (c) difficult | (d) difference |
| 9. | (a) at | (b) by | (c) to | (d) as |
| 10. | (a) flying | (b) riding | (c) cycling | (d) driving |
| 11. | (a) does | (b) doing | (c) done | (d) did |
| 12. | (a) black | (b) pink | (c) blue | (d) grey |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about Cuba. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. MY HOME: Make a poster about your dream home. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. DREAM COME TRUE: Write a magazine article about a Cuban who has waited 50 years to buy a house and now has one. Include imaginary interviews with the new homeowner and his/her family.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. DIALOGUE: Write an imaginary conversation between a new Cuban homeowner (whose dream of buying a house has come true) and Cuban president Raul Castro. The homeowner starts by thanking the president.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s). Role play your conversation in front of the class.

6. LETTER: Write a letter to Cuba's president. Ask him three questions about his decision. Give him three suggestions on what he can do to help his people in the future. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. F e. T f. T g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. quickly | a. fast |
| 2. rely | b. depend |
| 3. reforms | c. changes |
| 4. restrictions | d. limits |
| 5. stick to | e. follow |
| 6. serious | f. huge |
| 7. tiny | g. small |
| 8. potential | h. likely |
| 9. wage | i. salary |
| 10. available | j. to be had |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Times are changing | a. quickly in Cuba |
| 2. changes to help the nation's | b. housing shortage |
| 3. people had to rely | c. on the government |
| 4. properties must follow strict | d. building guidelines |
| 5. live on | e. television |
| 6. There are now too | f. few houses |
| 7. Overcrowding is reaching | g. record levels |
| 8. fierce winds and driving | h. rain |
| 9. easier said | i. than done |
| 10. only available on the black | j. market |

GAP FILL:

Cubans can now build their own homes

Times are **changing** quickly in Cuba. Cubans can now build their own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has **announced** changes to help the nation's housing shortage. For the past five decades, people had to **rely** on the government to provide them with houses. There was no such thing as housing loans or a property **market**. The new reforms will allow people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties must **follow** strict building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must **stick** to. Mr. Castro explained his decision **live** on television, telling his people: "I've given you this **amount** of space....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

Housing has become a **serious** problem in Cuba. There are now too few houses for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching **record** levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has had **difficulty** keeping to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has been made **worse** by three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed in the fierce winds and **driving** rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was **delighted** with the news. "My dream to have my own home may soon come true," he said. This may be **easier** said than done. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials are only available on the **black** market.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d 2 - a 3 - b 4 - c 5 - c 6 - b 7 - d 8 - a 9 - b 10 - d 11 - c 12 - a