

Open Letter to President Obama: Support Civil Society in Cuba

Dear Mr. President,

Your administration has taken several important steps to support the Cuban people by opening travel for Cuban-American families, expanding remittances, and enabling purposeful travel for more Americans. Those policies have fostered direct contacts between the United States and the Cuban people, provided a lifeline for average Cubans, and empowered Cuban civil society. As a result, Cuban society and U.S. society are sharing more information and are more connected today than in the past fifty years.

Now more than ever the United States can help the Cuban people determine their own destiny by building on the U.S. policy reforms that have already been started. Such efforts would seek to provide openings and opportunities to support the Cuban people in their day-to-day economic activities, and in their desire to connect openly with each other and the outside world and to support the broad spectrum of civil society, independent, non-state organizations created to further individual economic and social needs irrespective of political orientation. Doing so not only promises to deepen the contacts between the U.S. and Cuban society, it will also help Cubans increase their self-reliance and independence.

But timing matters and this window of opportunity may not remain open indefinitely. At the same time, the U.S. is finding itself increasingly isolated internationally in its Cuba policy. In the current political climate little can be done legislatively, but the Obama Administration has an unprecedented opportunity to usher in significant progress using its executive authority at a time when public opinion on Cuba policy has shifted toward greater engagement with the Cuban people while continuing to pressure the Cuban government on human rights.

The undersigned members—individuals from the private sector, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, and foundations—acknowledge and appreciate the steps you have taken to improve U.S. – Cuban relations. We further propose the following recommendations that you, Mr. President, can take through executive authority to deepen the changes already underway by giving greater freedom to private organizations and individuals to directly and indirectly serve as catalysts for meaningful change in Cuba.

1. Expand and safeguard travel to Cuba for all Americans

- a. Expand general licensed travel to include exchanges by professional organizations, including those specializing in law, real estate and land titling, financial services and credit, hospitality, and any area defined as supporting independent economic activity.
- b. Expand travel by general license for NGOs and academic institutions and allow them to open Cuban bank accounts with funds to support their educational programs in Cuba.
- c. Authorize U.S. travelers to Cuba to have access to U.S.-issued pre-paid cards and other financial services—including travelers' insurance—to expand possibilities for commerce with independent entrepreneurs and safeguard people-to-people travel.

2. Increase support for Cuban civil society

- a. Allow unlimited remittances to non-family members for the purpose of supporting independent activity in Cuba and expand the types of goods that travelers may legally take to the Island to support micro-entrepreneurs.
- b. Establish new licenses for the provision of professional services to independent Cuban entrepreneurs.
- c. Authorize the import and export of certain goods and services between the U.S. private sector and independent Cuban entrepreneurs.
- d. Allow U.S. NGOs and other organizations to lend directly to small farmers, cooperatives, self-employed individuals, and micro-enterprises in Cuba.
- e. Permit family remittances to be used as credits or equities in Cuban micro-enterprises and small farms.
- f. Allow U.S. academic institutions to issue scholarships for exceptional Cuban students.
- g. Allow for Cuban entrepreneurs to participate in internships in U.S. corporations and NGOs.
- h. Promote agricultural exchange studies between U.S.-based NGOs and private cooperative farms in Cuba.
- i. Authorize the sale of telecommunications hardware in Cuba, including cell towers, satellite dishes, and handsets.
- j. Authorize general travel licenses for the research, marketing and sale of telecommunications equipment.
- k. Authorize telecommunications hardware transactions to be conducted through general license in the same manner as existing transactions for agricultural products.

3. Prioritize principled engagement in areas of mutual interest

- a. The Obama Administration should engage in serious discussions with Cuban counterparts on mutual security and humanitarian concerns, such as national security, migration, drug interdiction, and the environment, among others. The United States should leverage these talks to press Cuban officials on matters such as the release of Alan Gross and on-going human rights concerns.

4. The Obama Administration should take steps to assure financial institutions that they are authorized to process all financial transactions necessary and incident to all licensed activities.

EMBARGOED UNTIL SUNDAY, MAY 18 AT 5:00AM (EDT)

John Adams, Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Retired); former Deputy U.S. Military Representative to NATO; former Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, U.S. Army

Ricky Arriola, CEO of Inktel

Joe Arriola, former Manager of the City of Miami

Bruce Babbitt, former Governor of Arizona; former Secretary of the Interior

Harriet Babbitt, former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States

Carol Browner, former EPA Administrator; former Director of White House Office of Climate Change and Energy Policy

Paul Cejas, former U.S. Ambassador; President and CEO, PLC Investments, Inc.

Gustavo A. Cisneros, Chairman , Cisneros Group of Companies

Jeffrey Davidow, former Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere

Byron Dorgan, former U.S. Senator

Andres Fanjul, Fanjul Group

Richard Feinberg, former Latin American Advisor to the White House; Professor, University of California, San Diego

Christopher Findlater

Mike Fernandez, Chairman of MBF Healthcare Partners

The Right Reverend Leo Frade, Episcopal Bishop of Southeast Florida

Dan Glickman, former Secretary of Agriculture; former Congressman from Kansas

Lee Hamilton, former U.S. House Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Jane Harman, Former Congresswoman

David Hernandez, Co-Founder and CEO of Liberty Power

Vicki Huddleston, U.S. Ambassador (retired); former Chief of the U.S. Interests Section; former Director of Cuban Affairs at Department of State

Peter J. Johnson, Associate to David Rockefeller

Eduardo Mestre, Senior Advisor at Evercore; Board member of Avis Budget and Comcast Corporation

Marcelino Miyares, President MM Communications Inc.

Moises Naím, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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John Negroponte, former Deputy Secretary of State; former Director of National Intelligence

Michael Parmly, former Chief of U.S. Interest Section, Havana

Ralph Patino, Civil Trial Attorney; Futuro Fund Board Member

Jorge Pérez, Chairman, CEO and Founder, The Related Group

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

David Rockefeller, Honorary Chairman, Americas Society/Council of the Americas

Christopher Sabatini, Senior Director of Policy, Americas Society/Council of the Americas; Editor-in-Chief, *Americas Quarterly*

Carlos Saladrigas, Chairman of Regis HR Group and Concordia Behavioral Health; Chairman of the Cuba Study Group; member of the board of Duke Energy Corporation and Advance Auto Parts, Inc.

Ken Salazar, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior; former U.S. Senator; former Colorado Attorney General

Susan Segal, President and CEO, Americas Society/Council of the Americas

Ambassador Charles Shapiro, former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela; President, Institute of the Americas

Anne-Marie Slaughter, President and CEO of the New America Foundation; former Director of Policy Planning for the U.S. Department of State

Hilda L. Solis, former U.S. Secretary of Labor; former Member of Congress

Enrique Sosa, former President of Dow Chemical North America

Admiral James Stavridis, Commander of U.S. Southern Command 2006-2009; Supreme Allied Commander NATO 2009-2013; Dean of The Fletcher School at Tufts University

Alan Stoga, President/Founder, Zemi Communications; Vice Chairman, Americas Society

Strobe Talbott, former Deputy Secretary of State

Arturo Valenzuela, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs; Professor of Government and International Affairs, Georgetown University

Alexander Watson, former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs

George Weiksner, Vice Chairman, Credit Suisse

The above signatories have signed this letter in their personal capacities;
they do not reflect the views of their company, organization or university, current or past.