

**Families Torn Apart: Human Rights and U.S. Restrictions on Cuban-American Travel
Statement for the Record**

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Chairman Delahunt and distinguished members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the current reality in Cuba and to suggest measures the United States could take unilaterally to help facilitate processes of change already underway on the island.

Current Reality in Cuba

Almost 50 years ago the Cuban government imposed an unfair blockade on the people of Cuba denying them the exercise of their economic, civil and political rights. Later, the United States government imposed an economic embargo against the Cuban regime that has remained in effect for many years.

In 1999 during the Ibero-American Summit in Havana Cuban democrats, in spite of the intense repression from the government, created the largest internal opposition umbrella under the name, "TODOS UNIDOS" ("ALL UNITED"). In the document we stated our belief that whoever wants to act with moral coherency, must demand the elimination of the sanctions imposed by both governments.

Since we have not received an answer from the Cuban government to our request, we cannot ask the US government to do the same. It would be an undeserved political success for the Cuban government.

However, over the past two years, important factors have appeared inside Cuba that could hasten the necessary changes in the island leading toward the rule of law and a democratic system, without political prisoners and with multi-party balance.

Current factors for change:

- The slow disappearance of the founder of this totalitarian state, which has led to the rapid weakening of the authority of the new government. This situation will worsen in the next few months.
- The Cuban people have been removing the mask of terror imposed on them and are beginning to take active and thoughtful participation in determining their own future.
- Cuban democrats are concentrating in four or five political blocks that congregate thousands of activists, recognized more every day in the international arena. We also seek total unity with the exiled community because Cuba belongs to all Cubans.
- The authoritarian leftist platform in Latin America and in the Caribbean is becoming less effective every day, and Cuba relevance in this block is decreasing every day, but it is still threatening and we should never underestimate it.

U.S. Measures to Facilitate Change

Faced with these irrefutable realities, it would be prudent for the United States Government to take steps to ensure that the Cuban people receive, without delay, the help they so urgently need. In addition, Cubans must be the protagonists of their own future. This is the time when changes could begin in Cuba.

At this time it would be helpful to:

- 1- Eliminate all travel restrictions to Cuba for Cubans residing in the United States. They can be the best messengers of hope, moral support and relationships that are so needed.
- 2- Lift current restrictions that limit remittances to the island and which criminalize assistance to family members.
- 3- Allow Cubans wishing to cooperate financially with the internal dissident movement to do so without penalties. Those resources are necessary for the work of the dissidents in Cuba.

Conclusion

The elimination of restrictions that we have described would not solve the financial situation of the regime, but rather would immediately provide dissidents with the needed support, contacts and resources to carry out our patriotic activities. Cuban government officials are not interested in economic advantages, but political ones and such actions would consolidate society and weaken the political elite.